

2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

The Golden Collection 8

A collection of original publications
from the Bihar Yoga Tradition



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

The Golden Collection 8



1963–2013
GOLDEN JUBILEE

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Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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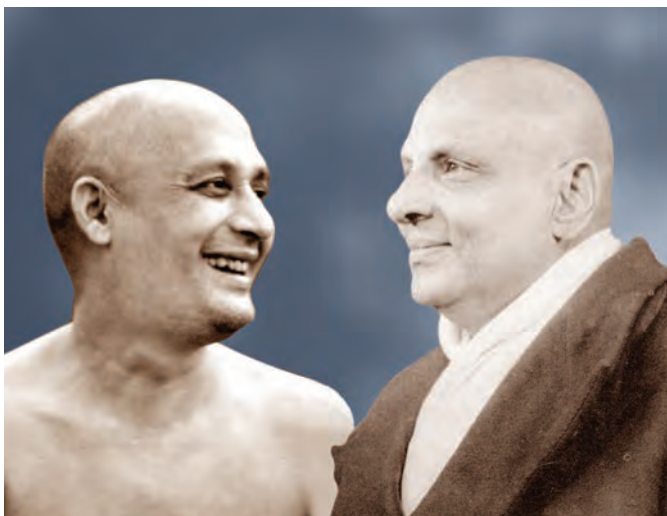
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga
and to our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

Swami Niranjan

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Preface

In the early 1970s and 1980s, the devotees of Sri Swami Satyananda carefully printed and published his lectures, discourses and class transcripts in small booklets, preserving and disseminating these important teachings. The booklets were their first contribution to their guru's mission of 'spreading yoga from door to door and shore to shore'. For many years these gems from the past have been out of print and unavailable. On the occasion of the Bihar School of Yoga's Golden Jubilee 2013 celebrations, these lost works have been compiled into a set of volumes aptly named *The Golden Collection*, so that once again the classic words which launched a yoga movement can inspire spiritual aspirants around the world.

In reproducing the booklets the original language has been kept intact, conveying the flavour of the time. The language shows the care that Sri Swami Satyananda took to make his teachings clear to his audience, never compromising clarity for fashion or style. His ability to present and adjust any topic to any audience is proof of the versatility which enabled him to convey his deep understanding of the potential of yoga to meet the needs of all.

A pioneer of his time, Sri Swami Satyananda gave a new dimension to the practice of asana, stating clearly that it can take the practitioner far beyond physical wellbeing. He often guided his disciples through letters brimming with snippets

of wisdom, which are as valuable and pertinent today as they were almost fifty years ago. *The Golden Collection* also includes a systematic introduction to the various meditation practices expounded by Sri Swami Satyananda. No step is missed and no precaution left out, allowing the aspirant to safely travel the journey of yoga and spiritual life. For each practice, whether antar mouna, ajapa japa or nada yoga, precision and clarity are the key. The branches of yoga are concisely elucidated, making them relevant to the daily life of each yoga aspirant.

Much that is taken for granted today was unknown or misunderstood at that time: it is the great achievement of Sri Swami Satyananda to have brought yoga to the general public and mainstream of society, truly making yoga a household word the world over.

The extraordinary quality of his being and spiritual attainments was recognized early in his life. While living in Rishikesh in the ashram of his guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, the young swami received glowing appreciation and admiration from guru-bhais, visitors and guests. To this day, tributes continue to express love and a sense of profound gratitude from all who have been touched by this modern day saint and his teachings. Sri Swami Satyananda, however, remained a disciple throughout his life and fulfilled his guru's mandate by making it his life's mission.

The Golden Collection is a true testimony to the wealth and depth of yoga and to its master exponent, Sri Swami Satyananda. In his early teachings he set the tone, purpose and aim of his mission. The reader is able to discover and connect with the roots of Satyananda Yoga, whilst appreciating its evolving contemporary nature, a trademark of this tradition.

Indeed, Sri Swamiji's prophecy, "yoga is the culture of tomorrow", has come true. His tomorrow is our today.



Introduction:

Yoga – Tributes to a Saint

On the occasion of its Golden Jubilee, the Bihar School of Yoga presents a collection of tributes paid to its founder, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati, which were published in *Yoga* magazine in 2010.

After Sri Swamiji attained Mahasamadhi, on 5th December 2009, at Rikhiapeth, Jharkhand, devotees and disciples, associated with the Bihar School of Yoga, expressed their respect and thanks to the saint who gave direction and meaning to their lives. He willingly and consciously ended his earthly life, but his presence in the lives of all those who knew him will never come to an end. This volume is proof of the everlasting connection of sincere affection between seeker and master.

Disciples and devotees talk of the profound guru-disciple relationship which changed their lives, opening doors to a new understanding of their place and purpose here on Earth. They describe the impact of his teachings, which many experienced as practitioners and teachers of yoga. For some, a book picked up in a bookshop made a student an ardent teacher eager to share the wealth of Satyananda Yoga – Bihar Yoga. Sri Swamiji offered himself and his teachings to the world unconditionally, giving whatever was the need of the day to whoever asked. With his radiant personality he taught a yoga that was accessible to people of

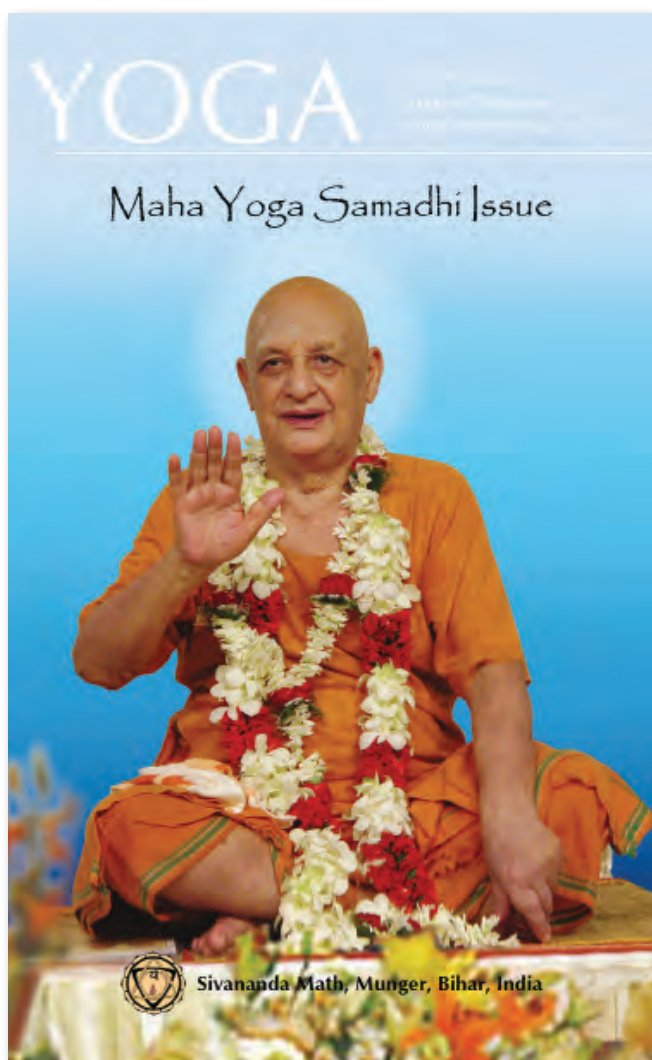
all creeds and nations. It was a yoga that could be practised, fully embraced and made part of one's day-to-day life. His ceaseless commitment to present yoga as a science of life was welcomed by all who recognized the need for such a practical yet holistic tool.

Another means to enhance the quality of one's life was born in Rikhia where Sri Swamiji applied Swami Sivananda's teaching of 'serve, love, give'. The practical implementation of these three words spread to hundreds of villages around Rikhia and around the world. This work is testimony of Sri Swamiji's pledge to involve himself in the upliftment of the individual and society. His teaching of *seva*, service, and *yajna*, sacrificial rites, was welcomed as a natural continuation to his mission of yoga, and people came in large numbers to Rikhia ready to follow the visionary, Sri Swamiji.

On the occasion of the Shodashi and Saptanjali ceremonies, conducted in December 2009 at Rikhiapeeth and Ganga Darshan respectively, tributes in honour of Sri Swamiji were paid by the kanyas and batuks of Rikhia, government dignitaries, Swami Niranjanananda, Swami Satyasangananda and sannyasins.

One common theme transpires through each expression of homage: Sri Swamiji left his bodily frame but he is alive in the hearts of those he touched with his presence and grace. His memory will be kindled forever by a deep sense of gratitude and the promise to uphold with dignity the path he has mapped out for all to walk upon.

Yoga 2010



Shodashi Anushthana

*Addresses given on the concluding day of the Shodashi Anushthana,
Rikhiapeeth, 22 December 2009*

Tribute to our father

Namo Narayana.

We kanyas and batuks feel very honoured to offer this tribute today to the great yogi who lived amongst us as our beloved Swami Satyananda. On 6th December, when we heard the *Bhagavad Gita* being chanted early in the morning at the ashram, we knew that something very great had happened overnight.

Soon we learnt that Sri Swamiji had taken samadhi and some of us could not hold back our tears, for that meant we would never see his radiant smile, his loving glance, his sparkling eyes again nor would we hear his kind words ever again. But then Swami Satsangi and Swami Niranjan appeared amidst us and told us that Sri Swamiji was forever in our hearts and that gave us the strength to smile again.

After all, that is how Sri Swamiji would like to see us. Strong, brave, confident and courageous. As the news spread, people started pouring into the ashram from all parts of the world. I think that day the entire world must have come to the ashram gates. We kanyas and batuks too came to bid our beloved Swamiji farewell. We attended the abhisheka of Sri Swamiji and had our final darshan amidst thousands of people. Sri Swamiji looked radiant as ever, so peaceful,

calm and serene. Even in that moment when he had left his body he looked so regal like an emperor and so graceful and beautiful. We will always remember him in our hearts, for he has found a place there forever.

As the sixteen-day Shodashi Pooja began, we also joined in the ceremonies. What better tribute and honour could we offer Sri Swamiji! It is because of his grace that today we can stand before you with confidence, grace and poise and speak like this. It is because of him that we have learnt many other useful things like modern and classical dance, English, drama, chanting of Sanskrit text and computers, the list is endless. We never dreamt that we could do all this, but he had trust in us and we had faith in him, so it all happened naturally and easily. You can say that our whole lives are transformed. In fact, we kanyas and batuks truly reflect to the world the power of guru's grace.

Before Sri Swamiji entered our lives we had nothing, we were nothing. He gave our lives meaning and awakened our innate and true potentials. He gave us self-confidence, self-worth and a goal and direction in life. He picked us kanyas up from nothing and he made us Devi – this is the true power of guru that we have witnessed in our lives.

We kanyas and batuks were all born after Sri Swamiji came to live here in Rikhia Panchayat and are indeed blessed to be adopted by Sri Swamiji. We feel proud to be his children.

Rikhia was once a remote and desolate panchayat. Our parents tell us of the times when there was no food, no clothes, and no jobs. Since Sri Swamiji came here, there has been a spectacular transformation here in Rikhia from being one of the poorest panchayats in India's poorest state to what we see today – a dynamic and vibrant panchayat abundant in peace, plenty and prosperity. By grace of guru there is food to eat, schools to study at and a beautiful ashram to learn and grow under the peaceful influence of sannyasins, and above all, hope for a better and brighter future.

Sri Swamiji is always very close to us in our hearts and minds. But do you know this? Even for the kanyas and

batuks who live here in Rikhiapeeth, the darshan of our beloved Sri Swamiji was always a rare and precious moment. On 2nd December 2009, when we were celebrating Swami Satyananda's 86th birthday here at Rikhiapeeth, we were very lucky to have his final darshan. Do you know that on that day Sri Swamiji spoke only to us kanyas and batuks and our parents. He asked us who our father is and we kanyas and batuks replied with hearts overflowing with love, "You, You, You are our father, and you always will be." Swamiji, how can we thank you enough for giving our lives meaning?

We are very proud to have known Swami Satyananda and feel very honoured that such a great man came to live in our unknown and remote village. And now Rikhia has become immortal because Sri Swamiji's Samadhi Sthal is established here. His whole life was dedicated to the upliftment of humanity.

His guru, Swami Sivananda himself had compared Swami Satyananda to Nachiketa when he said, "Few would have such vairagya at such a young age. Swami Satyananda is full of the Nachiketa element. Yet, any work he takes up he will complete in a perfect manner. He does the work of four people and yet never complains. He is a versatile genius, yet humble and simple."

It is said that when great yogis such as Paramahansa Satyananda abandon the gross body, they become ever powerful and their spiritual potential is magnified as they are not confined by the limitations of the body. Our beloved Sri Swamiji is now free from the shackles of the gross body and his divine presence pervades all creation. He is now omnipotent and omnipresent. We kanyas and batuks feel Sri Swamiji is still present amongst us to bless us all, as he lives in our hearts. We feel his presence everywhere, in the gentle breeze and in the warm sun, in the chirping of the birds and in the drifting clouds, wherever we look we see him.

Swamiji, whenever we need to feel your presence we will look up into the sky and we know that you will be there smiling down on us and showering your love and blessing

upon us all. Swamiji, with your blessings there is nothing we cannot achieve and nothing we cannot overcome. Please Swamiji, shower your blessings on us forever.

We know that Sri Swami Satyananda loved Rikhia very, very much and always felt very happy when he saw us because his face always lit up with a beautiful smile. In 2007, during the sacred Sat Chandi pooja, Swami Satyananda declared that Rikhia would be known as Rikhiapeeth and appointing Swami Satyasangananda as the first Peethadishwari of Rikhiapeeth, gave her the sankalpa to ensure that the three fundamental teachings of Swami Sivananda, ‘serve, love, give’, are practised and lived here in Rikhiapeeth. He also said, “Rikhiapeeth has a very bright future because I am its foundation.”

Today, with guru as sakshi, we kanyas and batuks, who are the very lucky children of Rikhia panchayat, make our sankalpa to fulfil all the dreams that Sri Swamiji had for us and pledge ourselves to always be worthy of guru’s grace and treasure the two flowers he has left behind for us – Swami Niranjanji and Swami Satsangi.

Namo Narayana.

—*The Kanyas of Rikhia*

On the occasion of Sri Swami Satyananda’s Mahasamadhi
Hari Om.

Our Paramgurudev, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati, attained Mahasamadhi at the ajeya muhurta of 5th December in Rikhiapeeth. On the evening of 6th December, he was given bhu samadhi. Thereafter, in his tapobhoomi Rikhiapeeth, as per the sannyasa tradition, the sixteen-day Shodashi Anushthana was completed. From 24th to 30th December, a Shraddhanjali Saptah was organized at Ganga Darshan to offer our respects to Sri Swamiji.

To fulfil the instructions to propagate yoga given by his guru, Bhumandaleshwar Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati, Sri Swamiji established the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963

in Munger, on the banks of the northwards-flowing Ganga, thereby earning for Munger the accolade of 'city of yoga'. Munger was Sri Swamiji's karmabhoomi.

To give a practical form to the essential teachings of 'serve, love and give' of his guru, Sri Swamiji established Rikhiapeeth in Rikhia village. Rikhiapeeth is Sri Swamiji's tapobhoomi and now it is also his samadhi sthal.

As we all offer our tribute to Sri Swamiji, I would like to read out a poem written by him:

*My wishes have all matured
And I have written the whole song.
Today my songs rise
From all directions of the world
And in the limelight
Of the moon and stars
Flows the light of your prana.
All the Vedas have been sung
And all the shastras have been written.
Today I have given the prana
Of my jnana to all.
And I have already given you everything
In the form of two beautiful flowers.*

Although Sri Swamiji has left his physical body, he will remain alive in the hearts of each one of us, for all times to come, as long as we can remain simple and innocent. It is this thought, this feeling that I share with you so that together we may maintain alive the inspiration which Sri Swamiji ignited in us.

At present it is my responsibility and commitment, given to me by Sri Swamiji, to work for yoga and propagate yoga through the Bihar School of Yoga.

I have the rare opportunity and privilege of receiving the blessings of Sri Swamiji for three generations – consisting of my grandparents, my parents and myself. It is my honour-bound commitment to uplift and maintain the standards of the Satyananda Yoga Tradition, as founded by Sri Swamiji, and as maintained by Swami Niranjanananda.

To fulfil this responsibility, I submit myself wholeheartedly to our Sadgurudev, Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati, to our Paramgurudev, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Peethadhishwari of Rikhiapeeth, Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati, and my guru, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati.

I convey my honour-bound commitment, and I look forward to your unfailing and unflinching support, friendship and generosity. I seek the blessings of the luminaries of our tradition, to grant me the wisdom, the courage, the faith, the determination and the conviction, to tread the path as inherent in their teachings and the shastras.

I pray that I may be guided at every step of the way, to act and live as per the examples and teachings of the masters. Although the journey may be long and I have only just begun, I trust that with their blessings, as well as with your support and good wishes, Sri Swamiji's mission will continue moving forward with dignity. And on the way, we may share some precious moments together.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

—*Swami Suryaprabakash Saraswati*

Namo Narayana.

We are all gathered here at the culmination of the Shodashi or sixteen-day pooja in honour of the great yogi Sri Swami Satyananda who took Mahasamadhi at midnight on 5th December, not to grieve, but to acknowledge the fact that even though Sri Swamiji has cast off his body, he is still alive and amidst us, inspiring and uplifting us to experience spiritual bliss and ecstasy, thus transforming even his departure from this earthly plane into a spiritual experience.

Yes, indeed, the question which emerges loud and clear from the depths of his Samadhi is, "Can death bring happiness, bliss, joy and ecstasy?" I had not imagined or ever heard the outcome of death to be ecstasy. Death to all of us is the most dreaded reality. No one wants to die. We are all afraid of death and avoid even thinking or talking about it.

Even though death is the only certainty of life, we turn our faces away from it as if it is a monster that we do not want to encounter.

No matter whether you are rich or poor, powerful, learned, wise or even a renunciate and accomplished sannyasin, the thought of death makes you tremble with fear and anxiety. Even the greatest of persons have to bow their heads in submission before death. Simply no one is spared.

That is what I had seen and heard about death. Until I saw first-hand the event of Sri Swami Satyananda's Samadhi. He invited his own death. I might tell you, if you don't already know this, that my Guru had received the boon of *iccha mrityu* or death by choice. He also had the knowledge of *kaya kalpa* or total rejuvenation and metamorphosis of the body.

In other words, he did not have to die. He chose to die. He could have lived another twenty years in the same body if he wanted because he had the option. Of course, in true Swami Satyananda style he chose the more difficult option because, as we all have seen and known about him, he never did anything without a mandate or a divine purpose.

If you recollect, Sri Swami Satyananda came to Rikhia to leave his body. This destination, which is the cremation ground of Sati, was chosen for him, to depart from the planet. He came here with a mandate. That mandate was not to create an ashram or to make disciples or to become famous. That mandate was to remember God with every breath, until his last breath.

He often said, "I have come to Deoghar to abandon my body. I have put in many applications, but all have been turned back, because I have asked for a return ticket and there are none available. The day I am granted a return ticket I will leave at once. Do not be attached to my physical body. See me within."

Ironically, by coincidence or design, the message he sent out through the medium of the kanyas when they enacted the journey of Nachiketa to Yamaloka from *Kathopanishad* during this year's Sat Chandi Mahayajna and Yoga Poornima

was, “I am not this body, I am not this mind, I am not the senses, Immortal Self am I.”

Well, it seems his request for a return ticket was at last granted. For on 5th December, only three days after he had addressed all of you on Margasheersha Poornima when we had celebrated his most auspicious birth, he called me to his abode at Tulsi Kutir at 10 pm and told me, “The time has come for me to go, I am leaving the earthly plane. Whatever I have done in my life was directed and had a purpose, my death too has a purpose”.

He left like a yogi, seated in padmasana and in meditation. What I saw was something unimaginable, perhaps it is only written in the books, certainly no one has made an exit so grand and so befitting of the greatness of his life. He simply inhaled and with a deep breath withdrew his pranas from his body. He had said to me that a second before I depart from this body I will receive knowledge of all the vidyas in the universe and that will be the fulfilment of this life. Let me tell you that we should rejoice and feel proud because our beloved Gurudev was successful, for he did receive what he had dedicated his whole life for.

It was around midnight during ajeya muhurta that he made his grand exit and the universe was ready to receive him. The moment he chose only shows his profound knowledge of the universe, for at that time the web or network of the universe had parted to make an opening through which his causal body could pass freely to all the lokas. In other words, he had the perfect flight!

Sri Swamiji himself had said in his satsang at Rikhiapeeth which was published in *Yoga Vidya* in May 2000, “When I leave my body I will not depart in the government bus. My flight will be by the first class jet, straight upwards. No stops, just one straight flight to the place I have to reach. Brihaspati loka to Shukra loka to Yamaloka, to Bhairava loka and beyond, I will pass through with ease, not stopping anywhere. I will forge straight ahead to my destination and I also have a return ticket. I am telling you this because I have to return here again.

I don't want any kingdom, I don't want pleasure and comforts. I don't even want liberation from birth and death. I just want to return again and again to help those who are suffering."

Mind you, the time he chose was not the ideal time because all the powerful planets were placed in such a way that although there was an opening it was a risky affair. But his purity, his immense faith and bhakti and his selflessness saw him through and the universe parted to receive him with open arms, and divine forces escorted him ensuring his safety, security and wellbeing.

I was there. I don't know what good karmas I may have done to earn me this merit. It was a spiritual experience that granted me those meditative states that one attains after arduous efforts. The entire vision, perception, understanding and experience that he granted me on a platter was that of swapna and sushupti. I was the drashta, the seer of an event that will go down in history.

The melting of everything into spirit is a state no one can describe. But it can be experienced. A great bliss is felt, eternal fullness of joy, knowledge and love. It is as if a great force takes you out of yourself to witness and experience the joy of existence. That is the experience that overtook me. Imagine that, the most dreaded event of death instead of being traumatic brought me ecstasy, bliss and total communion with my Guru. It was awesome and overwhelming!

Not just me, I think that night and even to this day Swami Satyananda is felt all over the planet. I do not need to prove the efficacy of my words. We have had messages pouring in from known and unknown, and all have just one thing to say, "We feel joy, bliss, ecstasy. We feel the presence of Swami Satyananda everywhere. Wherever we look, we see him."

In other words, Sri Swami Satyananda has become omnipresent. He has pervaded the universe right down to the atomic level of the elements. Now if you want to access him, all you need to do is remember him as you knew him with his bewitching smile and sparkling eyes, his wit and humour, his wisdom and compassion and his charming demeanor.

So, apart from teaching us the lesson of life, our beloved Guru has also taught us how to die and the great truth that death is not to be dreaded, as it can bring happiness if you live your life correctly, just as he did. It is now time for each of us to take a sankalpa to tread the path he has shown us and emulate his teachings so that we too at the time of death can leave this world a better place. That would be the most befitting tribute to Sri Swami Satyananda.

Namo Narayana.

—*Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati*

Namo Narayana.

Today we conclude the sixteen-day Shodashi Anushthana after the Mahasamadhi of our Guru, Sri Swami Satyananda.

Sri Swamiji came to Rikhia in 1989 and departed from his body in 2009, after twenty years. Sri Swamiji has himself said, “My life is divided in twenty-year cycles.” From birth to the age of twenty he lived at home. From the age of twenty-one to forty he served his guru, Sri Swami Sivananda, at Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh. From forty-one to sixty he established the monument of yoga in Munger according to the instructions of his guru, and dedicated that monument to his guru. His next twenty-year cycle started in 1989 when he came to Rikhia. Here he dedicated his life to live and propagate the teachings of Swami Sivananda. Thus, Rikhiapeeth is the second monument created by him and dedicated to his guru.

Today, the two eternal monuments created by him, Munger and Rikhia – one dedicated to the mandate of the guru and the other to his teachings – today offer their tribute to the great visionary, Sri Swami Satyananda, who was the crown jewel disciple of our Sadguru, Sri Swami Sivananda.

Rikhiapeeth

After establishing and dedicating Rikhiapeeth to Sri Swami Sivananda, Sri Swamiji appointed Swami Satsangi as the

Peethadishwari or acharya of this place. He saw in her the potential to carry forward to greater heights the work that he had started. After seeing her commitment, dedication and devotion, he gave her the initiation of Paramahansa, and today the Peethadishwari of Rikhiapeeth, Swami Satyasangananda, is sitting before you as Paramahansa Satyasangananda.

She will be carrying forward the vision given to her by our guru, Sri Swami Satyanandaji, to maintain, propagate and live the teachings of Sri Swami Sivananda, to serve, to love and to give. Therefore, the people of Rikhi Panchayat should never think 'What will happen to us'. Sri Swamiji has made complete arrangements here – not only so the people are looked after, but also to install a person who can fulfil his wishes and his vision. Therefore, Rikhiapeeth has not been orphaned, but has been strengthened with Swami Satsangi.

Swami Satsangi will now be travelling to different parts of the country and the globe to give the message of spiritual life to aspirants and seekers. You have the opportunity to see her, invite her to your town, to your country, to your home, to your village – wherever you wish to invite her, so that she can come and bring guru's grace in that region.

The next phase

There is also a question in people's minds, what will Swami Niranjana do now. Sri Swamiji had made it very clear to me that during this year, 2009, one chapter of my life is to close and a new one is to begin. He said to me, for forty years you have been travelling, you have lived the life of a parivrajaka. You have travelled through the country and the world. You have carried the message of yoga and showered the blessings of our parampara. Now your parivrajaka life has to end. And he gave me a clear direction for the next phase of my life.

The situations have also evolved in accordance with his mandate. In the year 2008, Swami Suryaprakash was appointed President of the Bihar School of Yoga and I became free of my institutional obligations. The future yoga

work will now be guided by Swami Suryaprakash with the blessings, guidance and inspiration from Swami Satsangi, and I will walk my path keeping in mind the direction and guideline given to me by Sri Swamiji.

When Sri Swamiji appointed me as his successor it was not to direct an institution, it was not for the post, power or position in the yoga world, it was not to receive the garlands and accolades that come with name and fame. In an institution, administrators change and they can be anyone.

The succession that I have received from my guru is that of sannyasa. His commitment to sannyasa is what I have received as my inheritance. His sannyasa life was completely infused with renunciation, faith, surrender and austerity. When he nominated me as his successor, his intention was that I would succeed him in his sannyasa, his sankalpa, his dedication, his belief, his faith. In order to cultivate that, he has made me free from my social and institutional obligations.

I am not a sannyasin of Munger or of Rikhia; I am Swami Satyananda's sannyasin. I do not belong to Munger, neither do I belong to Rikhia. They came much later after I had dedicated my life to my guru. When I was born, he held me in his arms. When I was three years old, he declared that I was the successor of his sannyasa, spiritual sadhanas and attainments. I have a sankalpa – to realize in my life the inheritance that my guru gave to me.

Today, I sit before you not as an acharya or teacher, member or post holder of an institution, but as a sannyasin, asking for your prayers so that I can be the worthy successor of the sannyasa of my guru.

I am praying to Sri Swamiji for wisdom, understanding and strength to live the life and tread the path that he has walked as a sannyasin. I am sure that all your prayers will help me fulfil my goal and aspiration.

Hari Om Tat Sat, Namo Narayana.

Hari Om Tat Sat, Namo Narayana.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*

Tributes to a Saint

Emperor of yoga

How can we ever write about a man who is more emperor of yoga than just a swami? He touched everyone with his lion's roar, and filled every heart with what was needed. No words can describe him. Living with him expanded our view of the world as a place to act and play in joy, and to love his simple words: "A guru may leave his body, but will continue to live in the heart of every disciple. His spirit lives forever if the disciple is in tune with him. He guides us at all times, in thought, emotions and in actual life. Disciples may go away, but guru's grace follows them."

He said, "I do not feel I have done anything because my simple philosophy is that everything is an expression of guru's will." The message we have to remember is that if we are a disciple, we must be ready to dedicate all to our guru and direct our effort and endeavour to carry out his work, whatever it may be, because we are merely an extension of our guru in body, mind and consciousness.

—*Rishi Hridayananda Saraswati, Australia*

Blessed with grace

I first met Sri Swami Satyananda as he came through Sydney on his 1969 world tour. Even though I did not see him again for six years, from the moment we met, my life took a

complete turn and headed off in a direction of indescribable beauty.

The guru-disciple relationship is not necessarily a physical interaction on the level of mentor to student. As I moved through India and around the world in the years that followed, Sri Swamiji frequently advised me and told me what was going to happen to me, and his predictions and direction were always correct. However, I always had the feeling that even though we were physically far apart, he was guiding me at some subtle level, and that the divine grace that flowed through him was a part of my life.

I received from him the answers I was desperately seeking. For instance, the reality of what a human being is, what life is all about and how to manage it, and even what death is. Previously, as a practising psychiatrist, I had been trying to help people find the answers to just those things when I didn't have the answers myself. Now I had the tools to be able to truly help people, not just with prescriptions, but with real mental, emotional and spiritual guidance. Added to that was the vast panoply of yoga practices that Sri Swamiji taught us, which proved to be extremely helpful in managing the mental and emotional distress that people experienced. Sri Swamiji had interpreted and developed a vast body of work in the yoga techniques, which made it all simple, sensible, logical and correct.

Sri Swamiji also taught by example – he was an impeccable warrior in the game of life. He also had a way of placing us in just the situation where we would experience our next lesson. During the years when I was travelling as a swami, he continually moved me from place to place, and it was uncanny that the moment I twigged to the lesson I had to learn from there, I received a message from him to go somewhere else where the next lesson awaited.

Sri Swamiji also inspired a vast worldwide organization, so that no matter where we went over the globe, we were with family, were able to interact with like-minded people, and express ourselves in serving, loving and giving in the spirit

of karma yoga. This continued in his Rikhia years as he once again set us an excellent example of how to provide effective help.

All through this, something much more subtle was happening to me and to all members of the Satyananda family, which is difficult to put into words. Even though we underwent conflicts and stresses in our lives, the outcomes were always harmonious and beneficial. The guru has a subtle, pervasive and positive influence over our whole life, no matter the distance – so that divine grace seems to bless us continuously. Divine grace certainly blessed those of us whose lives were transformed by that exceptional individual, Paramahansa Satyananda, and our gratitude to him is beyond words.

—*Rishi Vivekananda Saraswati, Australia*

Satsang

The blazing sun has set over the holy Ganga and the soft colours of sunset spread across the evening sky. A peaceful quietness falls upon the ashram. In the background noise of the surrounds can be heard music of kirtans coming from the nearby temples and village. At this time of the day the barefooted guru robed sannyasins and devotees make their way in one direction to the centre of the ashram grounds to a special but very simple building known as Swamiji's kutir.

This is where Swamiji, guru for the disciples, resides. But for the sannyasins it is a time for satsang, to sit in an atmosphere where the body and mind become quiet and still, where the soul is in contact with a vibration of complete harmony. Like chords of heavenly notes, the soul sings to unwritten chords.

The room is simply furnished with only the essential possessions. In winter there are mats on the floor and an earthen pot of glowing coals in the corner. A soft light is burning, and a sweet but pleasant incense pervades the air.

As you enter one bows to a being who radiates an abundance of warmth, grace and understanding, knowledge

of scriptures, of worldly affairs, of simplicity of life, and above all a love to guide you as an atman and not a separate personality or an individual. He looks not for the good or bad, but like a candle in a dark room, sheds evenly his light upon all.

His desires are of no material value or personal gain. His only interest is to help you grow spiritually and pierce the barriers of mundane existence. But first we must open the door to let this light enter. The more we open the door, the more light he will pour forth until the light is golden, constant and always part of you. Every thought is accompanied by the thought of guru. Each action is guided by his grace, and the whole of your life becomes a tune within a tune, which is in tune with the cosmic flow of pure and eternal energy. This is guru, that spontaneous overflow of divine energy of joy and bliss, leading one to experience the true self of infinite oneness.

Slowly and carefully he empties the vessel. Once again the clay returns to the earth, not a rock or stone, but fine earth ready to be remoulded, baked and filled to the brim.

When one can live within the guru, surrendering every particle of the human form, every thought and desire of the mind only then is life in harmony and balance, and like a fountain a quality of happiness and freedom flows forth from deep within. Guru is that never ending natural stream of divine grace.

So, satsang is over. Although very little was said verbally the sannyasins and devotees have received a transmission of true spirit. They gently touch their guru's feet and peacefully leave the room.

—*Swami Atmamuktananda Saraswati, Australia*

The legacy of a saint

What can you say about a person who has been in the centre of your mind for your whole life! Sri Swami Satyananda was a guru, a father, and a totally loyal friend. Many times I failed

him, but he never failed me. He had the sweetness to melt any heart and the sternness to evoke fear and obedience. Sri Swamiji's gave my life meaning, purpose and direction. Often life has led me away from my purpose, so that I would have to deal with the mundane necessities, yet the purpose was always calling.

Sri Swamiji's personality was a combination of poise, intelligence, humour, love and genius, and this marked his dynamic work ethic. He never tired. All his work was done with others, by others, through others and for others, and he always inspired effort beyond our limits. He started with a briefcase inscribed 'International Yoga Fellowship Movement' and within a year had established the Bihar School of Yoga (BSY). The rest is history.

When he left Munger, Sri Swamiji said, "My duty is over." All the Ganga Darshan buildings were empty with just a few swamis' footsteps echoing in the vacant halls as they worked to keep everything clean. A few ignorant sceptics used to say he had created a white elephant. Within a few years, the entire complex was at full capacity with waiting lists for all courses, and the institution is the pride of Munger and Bihar.

Life with Sri Swamiji was simply great. We learned to think in uncomplicated ways, we loved each other and all the people we were involved with. He was always at the hub, everything went through him, all authority rested with him. Through him we learned to ask for a pencil, a key, a piece of paper, or a huge amount of money for a major project. It is not easy to express in words the depths of our feeling for him, but it was through him that we awoke to those feelings within us.

Sri Swamiji was original; his own experience of yoga was based on the expansion of awareness through purification. While all the books and teachers of the past based their teachings on being good and kind and observation of various ethics, Sri Swamiji never imposed these messages in his life or teachings. He used to say that purification was not a moral or ethical issue to be superimposed on an impure

mind. While the yoga world was busy practising pranayama and meditation, he knew that the ultimate experience could not be reached without purification. The test for a purified mind is to be able to live naturally with the five yamas of Sage Patanjali, or *Bhagavad Gita's* Amritashtakam.

Sri Swamiji knew these verses not as a practice, but as an experience. He used to say that elimination of karmas, both good and bad, is done through working for the needs of others – through karma yoga. It is Sri Swamiji's legacy that we know and attempt to practise this attitude.

Sri Swamiji has left us with the knowledge that rather than strut around the world stage as yoga teachers, we are on duty to serve the needs of others. The difference is immense: the teacher is only aware of his own ability to string words together and make people listen to him, while the server relates his own deep feelings for the subject and to others' thirst for an inner connection with the sacred and divine.

In the early days at BSY, Sri Swamiji never mentioned God. Our ashram never hung an image of any god or guru except Swami Sivananda's. Sri Swamiji used to say that atman resides in the heart. He was quite strict about it and never liked us having his image in our rooms, but we loved him so much we secretly did have them.

Later, in Rikhia, Sri Swamiji became less accessible; indeed, we were lucky to see him for a few minutes when we went to Rikhia, but he did not leave us with a void. He gave us gods to worship. We began to love chanting the *Ramayana*, to visit Christ in his kutir, to be with Devi and participate in her poojas, and recently Lord Shiva was introduced in the Mahamrityunjaya yajna. Sri Swamiji came out less and less and left us with God and more forms of God.

Sri Swamiji was a sannyasin in every sense of the word. He had control of vast wealth and thousands of devotees, yet he never kept it for himself; everything was for others. He was truly a great human being, and I am so fortunate to have been under his influence for so long in this life. Yet, his influence has not passed with his passing. When a parent

dies, we experience a kind of liberation from their requests, but with Sri Swamiji his spirit lives on within us as if he has never gone.

—*Rishi Nityabodhananda, Australia*

Rising, not falling, in love

I was blessed to meet Swami Satyananda in 1974 following a series of events and dreams that led me to India to meet him. I had found yoga at a young age, reading my first book on yoga and ajna chakra when I was thirteen years of age and Swami Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* at sixteen years of age. This fuelled a deep thirst for yoga knowledge and practice. I was then indeed fortunate to meet a number of yogis in Australia who taught me the preliminary practices. However, my yearning for yoga was growing stronger and was not being satisfied by hatha yoga and simple meditation practices alone. Even esoteric yoga, although appealing and fascinating, left me feeling that there was something more; something was missing.

By grace and good luck, I met a sannyasin disciple of Sri Swamiji who told me of his time in India and showed me photos of Sri Swamiji. I felt an instant flash of energy and recognition, like a bolt of lightening, and knew that this person held my destiny in his hands. This led me, while still a medical student, to sell my most precious possessions to obtain the funds to travel to India, and to meet and study with this great man.

When I arrived in India I met a short man with a powerful and radiant personality whose presence, consciousness and energy was so great that I felt as though I was sitting next to a Himalayan peak or to the radiant sun. The experience of being with him was intoxicating. Just to be with him was to learn and to be nourished at the deepest level of my being. This meeting changed my life radically.

In one of our first meetings Sri Swamiji demonstrated how he could project his consciousness far into the future,

though it was only in the future that I came to realize what he was doing at that time. One evening I was sitting with Swamiji in satsang, when he turned to me and said that all I needed was a little more study and then I would travel the world and teach teachers. In my mind ‘a little more study’ meant that in a few months I would be travelling. For Swamiji it meant twenty years. He had a grand vision and perspective, and was able to see how all the parts fitted into the whole. This gave his decisions and actions great wisdom and skill.

Later I found that my experience was not unique. Most people who met Sri Swamiji fell in love with his personality, desired to be with him, to sit next to him and feel his radiance and love, and to listen to his discourse. It was immediately obvious that this person had knowledge, power and insight beyond anything we had ever thought possible or had experienced. To be with Swamiji was to experience the revelation of what was possible in life. This engendered in me a deep trust and faith in him and in spiritual life.

Despite our aim to be with Sri Swamiji as much as we could, his aim seemed to be to allow us to only have a brief time with him so that we could leave him in peace and get back to work. While we were with him we had a glimpse into what was possible, drew inspiration, and then had to leave and deal with ourselves.

Of course everything had a purpose, and in this case part of the purpose was to build independent and resourceful swamis and spiritual aspirants who could tune into essence, connect with the guru tattwa and experience the consciousness of guru within them. We were being trained to carry this awareness with us into our future lives. Each precious moment that we were with him we had another chance to experience that something sacred and unique that he projected from the core of his being. Then, when we moved away from him, no matter what we were doing, we would have to attempt to hold that connection to guru and consciousness while we were apart.

Time with Swamiji had two sides because while we were in his presence we had a clear vision of who we were. On the one hand we saw our strengths and what was beautiful, powerful and possible. On the other we had a vision of our weaknesses, and the knowledge that there was a lot of work to do on ourselves if we were to move forward on the spiritual path. It became clear to us just how much spiritual practice Swamiji must have performed to attain such heights. It also became clear how we would need to dedicate a lot of time and energy in order to hold even a fragment of that consciousness, clarity of vision and unwavering purpose.

And so it was that we entered into sannyasa training. Sri Swamiji was a hard but loving taskmaster. He stripped away everything familiar, our personality structure, our social conditioning and many of our concepts about life in order to open us to our spiritual essence. This was a massive retraining program for our minds and a great testing of our hearts. For many of us who came from foreign countries being in this environment held its own special difficulties. However, Sri Swamiji was there for each and every one of us. He knew what we were going through and held us in his heart and consciousness while we underwent as much spiritual transformation as we could withstand. When we had reached our limit he was there to help and support our recuperation.

It was common for westerners who came to India to develop diarrhoea, mainly due to the heat and as part of their physical and mental purification rather than as a symptom of infection or disease. I myself had many months of this dramatic purification. Once when I had reached my limits, my bowels griping, my body aching and my mind full of doubts and turbulent emotions, I went to visit Swamiji to ask him some burning questions about spiritual life that had been haunting my mind. I remember knocking on the door and being told to come in, as I moved towards Swamiji all the aches in my body and all the doubts in my mind evaporated. I sat down on the floor next to Swamiji

and looked up at him. He looked down at me and said, “Yes Swami Shankardev, what is it?” My mind was completely empty, I felt serene, and I seemed to understand everything. It all made perfect sense. I simply said, “I cannot remember why I came in Swamiji.” He said, “Hari Om Tat Sat,” meaning that I should leave the room and go back to work. As I passed through the door to his room the griping in my bowels and the aches in my muscles returned, and my mind was again full of doubts and burning questions, but something deep inside me had changed. There were many moments like this.

Once we were travelling in a car with Sri Swamiji. Passing by us was a very old Ambassador car that had obviously been burned in what appeared to have been a savage fire or accident, and then had been resurrected for use as a taxi. The paint was gone and the interior was mainly springs pushing out of burned seats. As we passed, Sri Swamiji turned to us and said, “That is the proper use of a vehicle.” I shuddered in the recognition that this was a profound metaphor for what our own bodies and minds would have to pass through as part of the fire of spiritual transformation.

In this way Sri Swamiji taught us to be resilient. He taught us to manage the elements of Nature within and without, to see our minds directly, and then to gradually come to master ourselves so that we could be efficient channels for his transmission. He gave us many gifts that we need to honour and develop for the benefit of all beings. Most importantly he taught us to recognize consciousness – to become more fully aware and authentic in all moments. It is his full-blown and awakened consciousness that was and is his most precious gift to us all. It is this consciousness that awakened us while he was alive and it is this consciousness that remains with us as a living presence in our hearts and minds today.

—Swami Shankardevananda Saraswati, Australia

Memories of Paramahamsaji

I was born in a conservative neighborhood, in a conservative country, at a conservative time. There was no meaningful or recognizable connection with spirituality in life. Even as a child I remember thinking, is this all there is? There must be another way?

Then the Sixties came. It was a time of rapid change and potential awakening. It was the first splash of water on the dormant seed, but it still needed the sun to sprout. What happened led to confusion because there was no way of knowing how to discriminate between the real and the fanciful. When the optimism ebbed away, nothing had really changed, but there was an awareness of awakened possibilities. That's when Paramahamsaji stepped onto the world stage.

After school it seemed you had to commit to something – a university degree, a job, a career, a marriage – anything; make yourself useful; useful for what? There was nothing worth committing to. It was just a period of marking time. I was looking for something.

I found it after a long series of overlapping events, that looking back seem like more than coincidence, when in 1983 I attended a program at the Mangrove Mountain ashram in Australia and I saw and heard Paramahamsaji for the first time. It was a revelation. Suddenly here was someone speaking the language for all the unexpressed, unexplained thoughts and feelings that had been going on as long as I could remember. You knew without the need of any further authority that he was speaking the truth. This recognition was not an intellectual idea. It took place inside. His words carried a quality from beyond the meaning of the words themselves and spoke directly from the heart of the matter to the heart of the individual.

It was the beginning of a connection that has never been based on any external relationship. What mysterious force made this connection possible for so many is not possible to say, but some experiences were common that explain at least the effect.

There was the recognition, at some stage, maybe after a period of checking it out, that, no matter how his presence seemed to make you aware of your own shortcomings and inadequacies, somehow you felt accepted exactly as you were, that you were okay, more than okay, substantial as an individual and alive with latent potential. This helped you recognize that this was the starting point – where you are now – where the journey really begins. Didn't he use to say that a person might have one hundred negative qualities but that if there was one good quality that he would help to bring it out? Didn't it always feel like that? It was taken care of.

I remember that there was a common understanding that everyone felt that he was speaking to each one individually; so much so that sometimes when an idea might be dropped casually, people would think that he had given an instruction to them personally. It could even lead to misunderstanding. This was the effect of the universal touch.

I never received direct training from Paramahamsaji. In later years he had given us Swami Niranjanji for that, but his presence was such a palpable force in life; in many ways, it *was* the life. The difficulties, trials and hardships, internal and external, of spiritual life would be impossible without the real manifestation of the grace within. He was the source and manifestation of that grace.

I remember once I was teaching in South America for some time – and that's about as far away as you can physically get – and it seemed like his presence was so real that sometimes I could be listening to my own words thinking, this is interesting I wonder where this is leading to, because it felt like I was listening to him and I was just passing it on, so to speak. Many teachers have spoken of this kind of experience.

Later during the many programs in Rikhia in that last amazing phase of his life, of which we all have our memories, one little phenomenon I recall. In the earlier years of those programs, he would move about the ashram almost unseen. He could just pop up by your side while you were digging

a hole or something, pass a comment and move on. At another time, he could step into 'the arena' and every eye would turn towards him, and he knew it would happen of course. He had such perfect integration with the prana that he controlled such things, and many other things beyond our knowledge and understanding. He said he didn't want our karma, but there's no doubt that karma was altered, adjusted, lightened. He stayed very quiet about it, but it happened, and we came to understand that. And for that our gratitude is the greatest.

In the earlier years of the programs in Rikhia, I was fortunate enough to be part of the kirtan group during those programs. Not having seen him since the previous year, at first the group would be sitting there onstage, sometimes with Paramahamsaji downstage, feeling maybe a bit sheepish, a little self-conscious, then, I remember one year particularly, it was like we all recognized at about the same moment that it doesn't matter, he doesn't mind, and we started behaving like rascals, laughing and joking and carrying on, rather like the kanyas do now. So the effect is universal. We are all his children at heart.

Now his presence is universal. I do not miss him because for me the relationship has not changed that much. And if it has, it is, I believe, because he is not bound by the physical body-mind that even the greatest have to live with, and his presence is the more so because of that.

His grace is everywhere and always perfect.

It seems to appear in some places more than others.

But it is always the same, always there.

Grace is like an ocean; the ocean is full.

What you get depends on how you come to it.

Still we will not see his likes again in a long time. His teaching and message was ancient at all time and yet unique, because without compromise he broke down the barriers of religious idealism and revealed the essential practical simple truth at the heart of the matter. And you'll be thinking like

me too: I was alive at the same time that he was here on this earth! But if there's one thing I miss, which *can* turn a bit sentimental, it's his smile and the sound of his laughter. Who can forget?

*O beautiful spirit that never was without
That is ever present in creation
Yet remains untouched and unseen
Because it is as it is we think it not there*

*When going out where is the thought of return?
But from the farthest shore, the deepest desert
The emptiest night, there is nothing to be gained
But the discovery of the end of all searching*

*When is all searching finally done –
A little bit more or a little bit less?
Sooner or later the one turns to the other
And the life in it discovers its own meaning*

*The flower must bloom in order to die
At the time of blooming there is no dying
But when death comes, only then
Will the purpose of blooming become clear*

*The final expression is the end of all thought
As we know it – it is no longer mine
Everything must take its course
And there is no doing that changes that*

—Swami Anandakumar Saraswati, Australia

Transmission guru

Although Swami Satyananda was best known and loved for his public talks and works, he had a very private and inner nature as well. Those sevaks and sannyasins, who frequented the ashram and experienced his association for long periods, would become familiar with this side of him. Just as he shared his wisdom and insights publicly through satsangs and talks, he also shared his private and intimate world with many of his closer

disciples and sannyasins. This was why he always regarded himself as a 'transmission' guru and from his earliest teachings he spoke of this aspect of the guru-disciple relationship. In the Indian tradition, there have always been such gurus and masters, who came to teach and enlighten through the inner path, and were able to transmit their teachings, directly from mind to mind, heart to heart and soul to soul.

In the early days at the old Sivananda Ashram in Munger, Sri Swamiji used to tell some of his disciples, "Please don't come to me unless it is necessary. Those who are frequently in my physical presence relate to me on that plane only and I also relate to them in that way. So, keep yourself far and learn to experience my presence and to communicate with me from within." Sometimes when Sri Swamiji was passing by the offices or rooms in those days and saw that some disciple had kept his picture on the table, he would ask, "Do you wish to relate with this picture outside or with me inside? If you wish to see me inside yourself, then take down the picture and don't put any others up." So down came all the pictures and the disciple would wait for Sri Swamiji to manifest through his own inner consciousness.

The idea of transmission may sound very esoteric and spiritual, but with Sri Swamiji it was just a natural way of life, of communicating, and also of getting the job done to his specifications. Many times a disciple would find himself in direct mind to mind communication with Sri Swamiji while performing a mundane task that he wished to be done in a particular way. The disciple would realize that Sri Swamiji was there in his mind, doing the job through him, and when it was done this special presence would vanish. Transmission is very different to psychic manipulation or possession; it is a light touch. Sometimes one knows that it is there in the mind, and then it goes silent again. In the course of ashram life and seva, almost everyone would have such experiences from time to time. The disciples did not need to be of such a highly evolved calibre to feel Sri Swamiji's presence and guidance within them at any time.

In a talk that Sri Swamiji gave earlier, he said that the relationship between the guru and disciple should be that of transmitter and receiver, and not just teacher and student. Transmitter and receiver is the real relationship between the guru and disciple. When this relationship develops, the guru and disciple may live anywhere, but there is an unseen connection between them. When one becomes a disciple, this inner connection must be established, and then transmission is possible. Sri Swamiji said that this was a very powerful way to be together, and this was the way he lived with all the disciples in his ashrams. It was interesting to note that the disciples who lived in far away ashrams often developed a stronger inner connection than those who lived in Sri Swamiji's ashram and experienced his physical proximity.

Sri Swamiji also said that the energy of the guru flows towards the disciple, who is in tune with him, just as energy automatically flows through the wire when the plug is connected to the power point. However, the wire must be lined with copper or aluminium. If it is lined with plastic, the energy won't flow through. Similarly, the disciple must be a good conductor, made of metal and not only of plastic. This is the first essential qualification for transmission. During the course of ashram life and seva, Sri Swamiji often helped the disciples to transform their inner nature into a stronger metal that would be capable of conducting his knowledge and energy. This he did in different ways by exposing them to various works, situations, interactions and hardships that would strengthen their inner nature.

The second qualification for transmission is surrender. During transmission the guru and the disciple operate on the same plane; there is no block between them. Physically they may be different, but spiritually they are one. The individuality does not function at this time. Sri Swamiji used the example of a bamboo flute to illustrate this experience. In an ordinary piece of bamboo the inside is blocked at one end, so that no sound will come, no matter how hard one may blow on it. In order to make bamboo into a flute, that

barrier must be cut, so that it is completely hollow inside. In the same way the last trace of barrier has to be removed in the disciple for transmission to take place.

Sri Swamiji used to say there are two types of relationship between the guru and disciple. One is through teaching and the other transmission. In teaching, the guru is always talking about spiritual life, but in transmission, the teaching is experienced within, something like the relationship between two lovers. Transmission is based on the theory of universal consciousness. The guru, who is established in the universal consciousness, can communicate with the disciple at any point in time and space, but the disciple also has to be a good receiver. In order to be a good receiver, the disciple has to lay down his resistance and become an empty flute. When he makes himself empty, the music can flow. The disciple may have his own mind and personality, but in relation to the guru, he must be zero. Then only can he act as a channel for the guru's knowledge and power.

In order to communicate with the guru through transmission, the disciple must be receptive and capable of functioning on the plane of universal consciousness, which is beyond logic, reasoning, and all forms of mental conditioning. Then the inner communication begins to flow between them spontaneously. As soon as the disciple is in tune with the guru, the energy, grace and wisdom begin to flow towards him. Two individuals who are spiritually linked can always communicate with one another, because they share the same mind. The disciple who has surrendered to the guru is a part of the universal mind. He and the guru are one, because their minds are united.

This is the real relationship between guru and disciple. Then the disciple will be able to communicate with the guru and receive his grace and instructions, even after he has left the physical body. This relationship was clearly demonstrated by Swami Satsangi at the time of Sri Swamiji's passing. During her life, until that moment, she had never had any experience of proximity to a dead body and, therefore,

had no idea of how things should be done at such a time. Immediately after Sri Swamiji's passing, at midnight on the 5th of December, she began to receive clear instructions from him, just as he would have spoken if he were still living. Step by step he explained to her what she should do next with his body and guided her through each procedure himself. In this way she was able to confidently perform all the necessary rites to prepare Sri Swamiji's body for the final darshan and interment.

Swami Satsangi conveyed her experience of Sri Swamiji's inner teaching at the time of his passing to support the faith of all the disciples, who were unable to be in Rikhia at that time and felt bereaved and lost. Her experience was a solace to us all and a proof that the guru is immortal and does not die with the body. It was also an example for all the disciples that they too can be with Sri Swamiji and receive his blessings and instructions, no matter where they may be, if they can open themselves to him and feel his presence internally. Sri Swamiji himself also said in recent satsangs that he would be much more capable of guiding and inspiring everyone, once he had left his mortal frame. He said that the physical body was a great limitation to him and kept his mind from expanding into the light. But once he was freed from it, he would be able to help everyone much more efficiently and effectively.

All the disciples of Sri Swamiji should take heart in this message and remember that he is with us all now, much more than he ever was before. He has never left us, and he will never leave us. He is with each one of us, and we only need to remember this in order to experience his presence in our lives. Sri Swamiji will continue to be our love and guiding light for all time to come. His light is eternal now; it has no limitations or qualifications, as we know. He is ready to share his grace freely with us all, but are we attuned to receive it? In order to receive his guidance and blessings, we must remember him and think of him always as a presence in our lives. We should not think of him only as he was, but as he is now, a being of

pure light. In this way each of us can share in his divinity and become a living vessel of his wisdom and light.

—*Swami Satyadharma Saraswati, Australia*

Receiving inspiration

My first meeting with Sri Swamiji was in 1977 when he came to the Mangrove Ashram in Australia for Guru Poornima. That particular July there were two full moons, and he celebrated Guru Poornima in Australia on 1st July, and then returned to India to celebrate it a second time in Munger later in the same month. To the best of our knowledge, that was the first time he had celebrated a Guru Poornima program outside of India, and we were very excited and honoured to have him here with us in Australia for such an occasion.

I was a teenage schoolgirl in Sydney at the time and had started visiting the Mangrove Ashram earlier that same year. I had found myself very much drawn to the photographs of Sri Swamiji on display in the ashram, and inspired by the teachings and the tradition, and this opportunity to actually meet him in person was not to be missed! I received mantra diksha and spiritual name from him on that occasion, and an immeasurable boon of inspiration. Swami Niranjan, who was then aged seventeen, was also in Australia at that time, and when we went for mantra diksha, it was he who let each of us into the room, and then sat beside Sri Swamiji while he spoke with us. When Sri Swamiji gave me my mantra, Swami Niranjan had to write it on a slip of paper, show that to Sri Swamiji, and when approved, pass it to me – it took some years for it to strike me that even with that very first initiation, I received it from Sri Swamiji through the medium of Swami Niranjan, and that mediumship is of course still going on today.

Two years later, when I took poorna sannyasa, Sri Swamiji said to his latest crop of brand-new aspirant swamis, that each one of us was as much his disciple as those who had

been with him for years already, and if he appeared to have more contact with this or that person, it was merely due to the nature of the work. We should never feel our personal bond with him to be any less because of physical distance. As he departed from Mangrove that same day, he held his hand out to us from the car window, and somehow thirty people managed to hold his hand all at the same time.

Between 1976 and 1984, Sri Swamiji visited Mangrove nearly every year in the course of his tours about the world, sometimes just for a few days, sometimes longer. His last visit, in 1984, was for six months, and on this occasion he travelled the length and breadth of Australia, giving satsang and programs at every Satyananda Yoga centre in the country. His visits were the high point of each year and we would clean the whole ashram from top to bottom in preparation for his arrival, even to the point of polishing the hinges on doors, and washing the leaves of the plants in the gardens! While we did not have much of personal contact with him, there would always be opportunity for a comment from him or some small experience to boost the level of inspiration. And such moments of connection, however small and rare, would be infinitely precious jewels of teaching for us that none of us would ever forget.

In 1988, Sri Swamiji departed from Munger and the Bihar School of Yoga – to which he had given all his energies for over two decades, and embarked on a pursuit of his own sadhana that eventually established him in Rikhia. While I was living in Munger I had the opportunity to observe the quiet social revolution that was beginning in Rikhia. While most of us think of what is to come in terms of days, weeks, months, or maybe a year or two, Sri Swamiji was always looking ahead, not just for the next several years, but for generations to come. Each year when the multitudes would flock to Rikhia for the Sat Chandi Mahayajna, we would see people from every country in the world, from all walks of life, from every age group and social demographic, all brought together like a huge family, because of Sri Swamiji and the

inspiration he gave. It is the children of the local villagers and their children's children who will show the fruits of the work that Rikhiapeeth has been doing, all of which has been designed with such intelligence and clarity of purpose that it can only continue to grow and expand for years to come.

I recall an incident in Rikhia where somebody had donated a mango tree sapling, and Sri Swamiji was asking the swami who had received it for details on the type of mango, where it had come from, what it needed for optimum growing conditions, etc. The swami had not managed to obtain any information at all, and Sri Swamiji explained to her that in order for it to be given effectively to someone in need, it was necessary to know everything about it so that the recipient could properly obtain the eventual benefits of the fruit. I have never observed another person with such a wide avenue of awareness, for even seemingly mundane details like asking a person unexpectedly invited to stay the night, "Do you have a toothbrush?"

Back at Mangrove Ashram the presence of Sri Swamiji is as strong as it was when I first came here in 1977. Now he has left his body, but I cannot find it in myself to feel grief. It seems to me that he had been saying that he wanted to go for some time, and he made very sure that everything was ready for his departure before he went, and the fact that he has gone now shows that everything was indeed ready.

All I can feel is enormous gratitude for my good fortune in having the opportunity to know him in my lifetime, and for that continuing inspiration in my life, and the lives of all in our enormous worldwide family which have been touched by Sri Swami Satyananda.

—*Swami Muktimurti Saraswati, Australia*

Unfoldment of nature

Sri Swamiji has been the guiding light in my life, shining a light on each turn of my path. In Munger ashram, in 1976, I was put in the press, to be in charge of the book-binding

department. I was so scared as I had never been in charge of anything. I came to the ashram a shy young woman with little confidence and suddenly I had to be responsible for a whole department. Swamiji told me, “No one must talk, look out of the windows or leave the room without telling you first. You are not to do the work, your job is to watch and make sure the work is being done and people are following the rules.” But all I wanted to do was sit down and fold paper or unravel bundles of string! I was also put in charge of cleaning the press which was inspected each afternoon. If there was a corner missed or a cloth hanging in the wrong place, I was the one responsible, so I had to learn to speak up and show people areas they had missed or not done well enough. I hated it and just wished I could sweep and mop like everyone else.

Sri Swamiji worked on everyone like this and one could see the transformations over the months and years. When I was sent to Rajnandagaon ashram I was told to learn Hindi, Indian culture, and how to cook Indian food. I learnt much more than that. At times I felt so lonely. I worked from dawn to dusk, seven days a week, grinding spices, cleaning rice, cooking, cleaning and singing kirtan in the evening. It was a very purifying time. I became happy with my own company and I learned to respect myself, and get to know and like who I was becoming.

There were many incredible experiences with Sri Swamiji over those years and I feel blessed to have him in my life. The last verbal instruction Sri Swamiji gave me was to get married and have children. He said to me, “Sankalpa, we need more spiritual minds in the world – have children.” I was shocked because children were not on my agenda, and I thought to myself, “Who with?” All was revealed six months later when I met my future husband with whom I have three sons.

Even though Sri Swamiji is physically no longer with us, it still feels like he sitting in my heart where he has always been.

—*Swami Sankalpananda Saraswati, Australia*

What do you want?

In 1977 at Mangrove Mountain ashram, I sat alone in the presence of Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjan. Swami Satyananda looked straight at me and asked the question, “What do you want?” I was sixteen years old, feeling overwhelmed and a little confused. I had wanted to take sannyasa for more than a year, and now, I could not say it. The previous year I had taken mantra diksha, so now I asked for a name. He called me Ahimsa, and it was over. I did not return to Mangrove Mountain until 1996, although I continued to practise yoga and to feel a deep connection.

Over the years whenever I faced a difficult decision, I would hear his voice saying, “What do you want?” It focused my mind as nothing else seemed to. The question seems so obvious, yet for me it had a dimension which was beyond the obvious. It was always associated with Swami Satyananda and although I didn’t take sannyasa at that stage, the samskara of yoga remained strong and was the source of strength I always returned to.

I next saw Swami Satyananda in 2001 when I travelled to Rikhia with my two children, their first visit to an ashram. What did I want? I wanted them to experience the presence of the wise and imbibe the qualities of the guru’s energy. I wanted them to have exposure to spiritual life and the company of saints. I wanted it to be easier for them than it had been for me, if they felt a connection and chose to follow this path. And I still wanted to take sannyasa.

That year Swami Niranjan gave my children spiritual names, and he gave me poorna sannyasa. For the children, now grown, the ashrams are homes away from home. They have taken their own initiations, they have been blessed many times by darshan of Swami Satyananda, and there is no conflict or confusion in their relationship to spiritual life or guru. There, surrounded by the kanyas and batuks of Rikhia, the ashram felt like a natural place for children to be. They saw Swami Satyananda’s love for the children and the joy he took in their presence.

The presence of the children of Rikhia gave me another treasured memory of Swami Satyananda. Again, the words were very simple. On the final day of the 2006 yajna, I was on photography duty so was able to be close to him. The kanya pooja had just concluded and the kanyas had all been given little backpacks containing prasad. As they filed out they waved and smiled at Swami Satyananda and he waved and smiled back, beaming like a proud grandfather. He turned to us and said softly, "They are smiling, they are happy!" That was all that mattered to him, that the children were smiling and happy. It felt that this was his total joy and fulfilment – to have been able to make children smile. Just as the question, 'what do you want?' sounds so obvious, it seems obvious that we would make every effort to bring smiles to the faces of children and that this would fill us in turn with joy. But so often, we see or know of suffering children and we ignore their plight. Happy children grow into happy adults, and then the whole world is smiling.

These simple lessons are worth so much more than all the complex philosophies that fill books and heads. Swami Satyananda could convey so much in a moment. The magnitude of all that he gave us is distilled in these precious moments.

I started yoga in 1975 and responded to it immediately. When the International Yoga Convention was held in Sydney the following year, I skipped school for a week to attend. Although that was my first experience of being in the presence of Swami Satyananda, he had already reached deep into me in more subtle ways and I had made a commitment to sannyasa in my heart. I was blessed to be at Ganga Darshan last December when he took Mahasamadhi. Rather than go straight to Rikhia, I decided to stay a few days there by the Ganga, in the place that had been the base for his dissemination of yoga around the world. His presence was strong, surrounded as we were by his work and spirit. When I did go to Rikhia, my duty was in the pooja area where his Samadhi is located. Over the days, many thousands of

people came. The atmosphere was relaxed and calm, the feelings were of love, gratitude and respect. Everyone had the opportunity to have darshan of the Samadhi and the nature of my duty meant that I saw them as they completed the parikrama. Often there were tears, but these soon passed as the experience of Sri Swamiji's presence there is intimate and close.

Namo Narayan Sri Swamiji.

—*Swami Ahimsadhara Saraswati, Australia*

An extraordinary servant of God

The majesty of having such a guru as Swami Satyananda goes far beyond what my words can express. His presence has connected me to eternity, to that unchanging reality, and shown the way to make this relevant to my daily life. How to thank him for that?

Swamiji was a modern day Lord Krishna, Sri Rama, Maharishi Patanjali, Sage Narada, Vedvyasa and Valmiki . . . he was all the greatest masters DNAed into one of history's most extraordinary sages. He used his genius not only in brilliant satsangs on any and every topic of relevance to yoga but also in the most practical and down-to-earth matters necessary to create and maintain one of the greatest institutes of yoga of all times, the Bihar School of Yoga. When he expounded upon yoga he did so not only as a philosophy or spiritual science, not only as techniques of asana, pranayama and meditation but also as a vibrant tantric lifestyle, as a marvellous interplay of devotion, mysticism, self-enquiry and selfless sacrifice. His yoga was and is the yoga of life itself. All were witness to his greatest siddhi, his ability to stand on his own two feet and cope with everything that came his way in the most efficient, positive and creative manner.

His entire spiritual life was spent in the service and spiritual upliftment of others. There's a very clear memory of his words at my sannyasa diksha, "One's own

spiritual evolution and that of the community are of equal importance.” We saw this when during his panchagni sadhana he was also fulfilling the Divine mandate to ‘serve his neighbours as God had served him’. His neighbours were some of India’s poor villagers, yet he didn’t give money directly into their hands and thus feed them with a meal or two, his vision was far more expansive – he gave them the means to earn their own livelihood. He gave items of great practical value to them – rikshaws, thelas, bicycles, bulls and cows, sewing machines, pots and buckets, carpentry and masonry tools, etc. He assisted them to set up small businesses, dig wells, construct homes for themselves, and improve the quality of their agricultural crops. He helped them to feed, cloth and educate their children. He sent his swamis out on tractors to plough their fields, if they weren’t able to manage it themselves. He called the women to the Akhara to cut the grass and then they took it home to feed their cows.

He could see the significance of every moment of existence and every experience in his life was accepted and valued. He took nothing for granted. I remember his most wonderful ability to take the slightest hint or the tiniest glint of talent or special quality in someone’s personality and empower them to use that to uplift themselves. No matter what that quality was, be it growing roses, baking bread, teaching asana, polishing brassware, presenting a lecture, laying bathroom tiles, knitting or even belly dancing . . . he could appreciate everything as part and parcel of the magnificent process of spiritual evolution.

He knew that we must realize God in and through the world, and see another reality behind this existence. Therefore, he encouraged us not to separate our life into the mundane and spiritual but rather, to look behind the comings and goings of our life, to be a witness all our celebrations and tragedies, gains and losses, sufferings and happiness, and to see all the idiosyncrasies of our personalities. He wanted us to see how we were riveted into

the endless cycle of births and deaths, and show us the way to release ourselves. In this respect he stressed the importance of karma yoga.

Karma yoga had been taught to him by his beloved guru Swami Sivananda. It seemed to be his most cherished sadhana, and he offered the same to us, as the heart of our spiritual training. He also provided a myriad of practices by which each could find their individual way to realize the immortal Self. All of the yogas: bhakti, raja, hatha, jnana, kriya, kundalini, laya, nada, etc., were systemically and expertly organized, explained and taught and preserved for posterity in his writings and audio recordings. He was a mastermind who left nothing undone or unfinished. It's an understatement to say he was a rare being.

Everything he did and every word he spoke was precise, pertinent, intuitive and stimulating. Everything had its place and purpose. Once he called me to bring some lime paint. "Bring it here now! Go quickly!" I ran, found the huge drum of newly mixed paint but there was nothing in sight to transfer the mixture into my small bucket so I used my hands. I raced back to him, pleased to have been so fast. When I stood in front of him he glared at my hands, pointed fiercely, and roared, "What's that?" "Swamiji, it's lime paint." "Idiot! Wash it off immediately! The lime in that paint can destroy your skin. Learn to use the correct tool for every work, every time." It was a simple and straight forward lesson that echoes through me even now, if I dare to take a short cut in any way.

Even when he was playing the role of the hardest taskmaster and performing his egodectomies, with training similar to Milarepa's, one could feel through his toughness, we knew that he was giving us opportunities to become 'real yogis', ever ready, sharp and aware! He could appear at any moment, and nothing was too little or too big for his attention . . . His hand would reach out to a tap to turn down the water flow if someone was using too much water. If he hadn't seen a swami for a few days, he would enquire about

them, in case they were sick and required special attention. One morning I saw him watching the carpenters make tiny bamboo pegs; later the same day, with a hammer in hand, he was helping to insert those pegs into the wooden legs of a small office table. He could show us how to prune trees, use the lawn mower, cure the roof castings on the construction sites, apply the enamel paint so that the finish was perfectly smooth, peel the veggies so as not to waste any. He was everywhere at all times; he still is. He has shown us how to become fully involved with life and how to give everything of ourselves to the people, places and events that came our way.

Swamiji found the way to surrender to God's will and become His instrument, or as he preferred to call it, "His servant." He inspired us to do the same in many simple ways . . . One winter's day he was inspecting the room where one of his foreign disciples was to stay for a short time. He felt the thickness of the mattress, checked the potential warmth of the blanket, and then adjusted the position of the mat on the floor. He told us, "Here in India, the guest is God. Bring her our best sleeping bag and pillow. She will be used to warmth and comfort. It's the least we can do to make her feel at home."

I must admit that it was not until many, many years after meeting Swamiji that I even began to understand the significance of the guru-disciple relationship, and what 'knowledge of the Self' actually meant. That this great master, who had realized the Truth himself, was prepared to instruct aspirants in that knowledge, totally silenced my mind! When I heard him say, "The purpose of mans' life is to realize the state of transcendental consciousness," my entire existence fell into a spiritual perspective and I knew for certain that people like Jesus Christ do walk this earth. It was the sacred moment when my faith became solid, and when I knew that it was he who could (eventually) awaken the Divine within us. But he took no credit for anything he did. He said, "You must have faith in God. It is the power; it is the force behind it all. What a fool I was to think it was me!"

Finally, Swamiji was a jivanmukta. He knew the secret oneness of existence and was totally satisfied with his own Self. He had nothing to obtain and nothing to avoid, and knew how to implement the cosmic will as the occasion or the environment required.

Swamiji, your dedication to sannyasa has set before us a living example of the highest calibre of loyalty and fortitude. It has shown us the degree of utmost surrender required if we are to live the life of sannyasa in full. As an aspiring sannyasin, I stand in awe of your commitment. How can I possibly pay homage grand enough to this blessed being who gave solace to us all? The remaining days of my life are not enough, but I quietly offer them to you.

Swamiji, of all the prasada you have ever given, your entire spiritual life was the most supreme and precious offering. But even then, you still managed to give us something more . . . Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi.

—*Swami Nirmalratna Saraswati, Australia*

A divine dream

I have started writing this several times but couldn't go on. What I want to speak about is far beyond the scope of human words, the experience is so deep and extensive that the mind cannot comprehend it. At this moment I remember the words of Tulsidas, "Even the thousand-tongued serpent goddess Shesha, the goddess of speech, could not describe this event," – and much less me, with my mean human intellect.

Indeed, how could I describe the radiance and brilliance of a sun in the cosmic dome of heaven which, abounding in deep compassion, grace and endless love, decided to put on the clothing of a human being eighty-seven earth years ago and came down amongst us with the aim to ease the sufferings and distress of humans, and draw them out of darkness and ignorance. This deity in human form lighted the cresset of the ancient science of yoga and victoriously

carried it 'from door to door and from shore to shore', attracting and conquering with his natural modesty and kindness millions of human hearts to follow him in his great mission. A life truly worth the heading 'I am the Way to Truth and Light' – the reason why his earthly name is Satyananda. No one and nothing could stop his triumphant passage, as no one can stop the sun from shining and the wind from moving. The gods and Nature paid him tribute by allowing him to accomplish the hardly attainable panchagni, followed by twelve Rajasooya yajnas – a privilege for triumphant emperors only. Through the invincible instrument of his sankalpa to 'serve, love and give', Sri Swamiji gave love, wisdom and light to each and every person whom destiny endowed with the privilege to come to his radiant personality.

On completing his earthly mission, Sri Swamiji showed us in a unique way that he holds mastership not only over life, but is also beyond the rules of death. His Mahasamadhi, which scaled the boundaries of the physical body, made him rise as a brilliant sun above us all, bestowing light, warmth and life. It also gloriously manifested that the cosmic powers invoked through the two yajnas this year accompanied this immensely great soul on the way back Home. During the first yajna the Divine Mother came down and cleansed with gentle rain the way to the heaven of one of her most beloved children. With what tenderness and admiration She was watching him through the sparkle in the eyes of the youngest kanyas during the last ritual of feeding Her!

During the second yajna, Shiva came down with his entire power and sprinkled with living flowers and roses the way back to the cosmos of one of his most immense human incarnations. Incredible flourish from all deities, who came to felicitate and pay tribute to the end of the earthly path of this human magnificence, was ringing in the mantras and filling the space during both yajnas. A truly divine symphony!

How can we believe that what we have witnessed is not only a divine dream, how can we express our gratitude to

God and guru for this grace – the fortune to touch and be immersed in this awesome event – the life and Mahasamadhi of Paramahansa Satyananda!

We cannot say anything but kneel humbly at his divine feet and offer: Thank you my God, thank you Sri Swamiji!

—*Swami Shruti Gyana Saraswati, Bulgaria*

Just light one little candle

Paramahansa Satyananda was a saviour. Many people talk about the problems of the world and modern civilization. Some others propose ideas on how we can bring about changes. But Sri Swamiji showed us the way: help the people around you, give them what they need the most and show them how to live in a better way so they can help themselves. The most important thing: start with the children, they are the future and hope of the world.

He was a living example, and the work he did in Rikhia is living proof of success. One of his ‘neighbours’ told me that most people in power do everything possible to take more and more for themselves, and only one person gives, Sri Swamiji. “The others just follow the ‘normal’ course of life and have brought us to the state we are in. But when one like Sri Swamiji appears, things begin to change and take a positive turn.”

One can say, “Well, people like him can do it, but we cannot.” Yes, we can. Swamiji gave us the example of what to do and how to do it. If we try and be an instrument for his work and his mission we will make Sri Swamiji very happy. In the darkness of the world the flame he lit in Rikhia shines brightly. And when we light our small candles in our homes the way he showed us (and there are thousands of us!), the world will become a . . . what will it become? Just try to follow his example and you will see! You will like it!

—*Swami Vivekamurti Saraswati, Bulgaria*

The greatest siddha of the twentieth century

Swami Satyananda Saraswati was the greatest siddha of the twentieth century. A *siddha*, perfect one, is an individual who is capable of bringing to successful fruition any chosen undertaking. Having accompanied Sri Swamiji on his journey for forty-one years, both close at hand and far apart, in the West and in India, I will try to elucidate Sri Swamiji's nature as revealed to me throughout what he once called our long friendship.

In 1954, a volume called *The Life and Works of Swami Satyananda* was produced at the behest of his guru Swami Sivananda in which his gurubhais expressed above all his ability to undertake any task and bring it to a successful conclusion. His primary undertaking, also emphasized by all writers, was the perfection of sadhana. All exclaimed that none at the ashram surpassed him concerning his own sadhana in spite of his numerous other duties, all performed with absolute devotion to guru.

After leaving the Rishikesh ashram to fulfil his guru's wish to spread yoga throughout the world, he travelled far and wide in the Indian subcontinent until establishing the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger. A few years later he came to the West for the first time to begin the initial steps of his introduction and establishment of a classical, but also a scientific approach to yoga. It was at this point in time, 1968, that I met Sri Swamiji in Vienna, Austria.

My background in yoga and classical Indian philosophy, was gained by years of study of the texts in translation. Lacking the availability in the West of a master of yoga of the calibre described in the shastras I had memorized the yoga sutras of Patanjali as my guru for my personal practice. My day job was research scientist for IBM engaged in the mathematical definition of computation. So I was a yogi and scholar engaged in fulltime scientific work.

My main personal problem at the time as a yogi was the lack of a sadguru, one who could guide me spiritually as well

as intellectually or philosophically. I had met many but none inspired me.

Sri Swamiji arrived and immediately we could converse at length about any aspect of yoga, Vedanta, tantra, etc. But most importantly, his practical instruction in yoga yielded almost instantaneous results, was ingeniously adapted to the needs and abilities of the practitioners, and passed on to these practitioners in such a way as to enable them to immediately teach others. All these attributes of his manner of teaching made clear to me at once that here was an extraordinary yogi solidly based on a vast knowledge of yoga tradition on the one hand, and on his unceasing personal experimenting with each and every yogic sadhana in order to verify the fruits or siddhis promised by the sadhana, on the other hand.

Why did his practical instructions yield almost immediate results? Because, as he always stressed, they were classical, that is, based on sound yogic tradition both written and oral along a living lineage of gurus. Furthermore, he only gave a few practices which were stripped down (careful) versions of powerful practices from kriya and kundalini yoga, hence their immediate though limited results. Some of the other attributes of his teaching follow from such a choice. First, if we practised the few easy to remember practices he taught one year, he could just add the more advanced and potent practices when he returned the following year, thus ensuring steady progress and permanence of results. The students, following his example in teaching only that of which they had personal experience, could keep increasing the number of individuals receiving the instructions of Sri Swamiji indirectly, but uniformly. So when Sri Swamiji returned year after year he could steadily and incrementally build on the foundation without losing control over the nature and direction of his exposition of the whole range of yoga.

This approach has proven extremely successful in the West, as is witnessed by the large number of publications, institutions, academies, etc. teaching Satyananda Yoga – Bihar Yoga today.

Two other attributes displayed by Sri Swamiji throughout was his devotion to freedom and his lack of distinction between aspirants. Both are signs of greatness since only those who feel themselves limited or endangered by others will insist on curtailing the freedom of others and imposing subordinating restrictions on others. Thus, when told of conflicts between disciples he would say, “Work on your own if you cannot work together. You do not even have to be loyal to the Bihar School of Yoga, an institution, or even to me, just be loyal to true yoga.” Sri Swamiji never once forced anyone to do anything. He would always say: “This is what the tradition has said, this is what I have experienced and thought about my experiences, and now you make up your own mind about it.” Never was he dogmatic.

In the years between 1968 and 1985, Sri Swamiji came to Europe for longer periods, and extended and deepened his exposition of all forms of yoga, their theoretical, pragmatic and technical aspects. There were extensive lectures and multifaceted practical residential sessions in which he acquainted us westerners with higher levels of interaction with a master through diksha and seva, and other aspects of the classical guru-disciple relationship. In fact, at one time there were more sannyasins created by Sri Swamiji in the West than in India.

After 1985 Sri Swamiji did not return to the West and I did not physically meet him again until 1999. In this period, Rishi Arundhati and I were involved in transcribing all his European lectures and programs. We established yoga centres in various countries and taught hundreds of students, though physically separated, Sri Swamiji was guiding us throughout.

This was the period when Sri Swamiji began the great transition from exposing, systematizing, (and) simplifying and permanently establishing the serious study of all aspects of yoga to his demonstration of the proper role of sannyasins and ashrams in society. According to his definition, sannyasins are caretakers. Resources flow to them due to

devotees, but these resources do not belong to them. Hence, sannyasins must take care to distribute the resources to those who need them in such a way that they are truly empowered. In order to gather the power and insight needed to demonstrate to us how this can be done he returned to the crucible of sadhana – panchagni sadhana.

On meeting Sri Swamiji in Rikhia after 15 years, he said to me, “Vasishtha, uplifting those who need is very difficult because it depends on many individuals. When I was spreading yoga throughout the world it was easy, it only required myself.”

For twelve years Sri Swamiji demonstrated in Rikhia how such elevation and empowerment of the most needy and numerous sections of society is implemented. Most of the lessons of what he has brought about in Rikhia will only be realized now after he has left us physically to fend for ourselves. But what he has established in Rikhia is not only a spiritual miracle in this world where miracles are few, but it has permanence because it is based on the people of Rikhia themselves, particularly on the thousands of children who have made the ashram of Sri Swamiji their favourite daily location. We swamis are in their eyes truly caretakers of the wealth originating from the Supreme Goddess. Finally, to ensure the vitality and permanence of the individual and societal benefits which have resulted from his vision and achievements, he has carefully chosen and nurtured throughout these final years, true and proven *adhikaris*, qualified people, destined to keep alive the love and spirit of Sri Swamiji and to further realize his vision and sankalpas in Munger and Rikhia, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati and Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati.

Words and space fail to do justice to the degree of accomplishment of siddhi displayed by Sri Swamiji throughout the years. I reiterate, he was the greatest siddha of the twentieth century and far beyond. It can only have been the grace of the goddess that brought about my encounter and relationship with Sri Swamiji for how could

I have imagined to have found myself so close to the living heart of spirituality.

—*Rishi Vasishthananda, Canada*

Perfect balance

Swami Satyananda was the most spiritual person and yet also the most astute businessman I ever met; and it was not for his own personal gain. Yet what he did, he made it prosperous and gave it prestige. He was up on the latest happenings in the West with his shortwave radio, as well as being daily, deeply immersed in his own personal sadhana. He had a very well-balanced inner and outer life. His vision was wide-angled and telescopic.

The feelings of love and gratitude to him can never really be expressed nor my personal debt to him repaid. He gave my life a dynamic purpose that is being fulfilled to this day. Even when we travelled with him, we were never sitting around at his feet, but always running errands for him. But I always found that it did not matter if I was sitting at his feet or cooking his food or doing whatever he needed doing, that his presence was there, and still is guiding, loving and inspiring one to be one's full potential.

—*Rishi Arundhati, Canada*

A disciple forever

Meeting my guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, was the beginning of the most important part of my life. He became my guiding light and companion on my spiritual quest. Finding one's guru is both the end and the beginning of a quest.

When I first saw his picture, sent to promote his visit to Colombia in 1971, without knowing him I decided that he was the one who would guide me. The subsequent meeting some months later was extraordinary, but at the same time an event that flowed effortlessly. It was for me an experience full of beautiful emotional content. He ended up staying

at my home during the visit, so I was lucky to have close contact with him. The second day of his visit I asked him if he was my guru and he answered: “Of course, I have given you several signs but you did not understand.” With that, I felt that I had completed the most important task of my life, and did not ask anything else. That moment was the beginning of a most wonderful and fruitful relationship, one that touched all aspects of my personality.

I was then a young lawyer just out of school and Sri Swamiji captured me with his amazing knowledge of life, not only from the yogic point of view, but also from the scientific, political and practical perspective. I had never seen such a complete person – both in the world and outside the world. Later I learned that this constitutes the essence of a true paramahansa.

At that time, I never thought that life would allow me to have a close relationship with such an important yogi. Early in his visit, during a satsang, I was sitting listening to Sri Swamiji speak in English for fifteen minutes and when he finished he pointed to me and said, “Now you translate.” To my surprise I could repeat all that he had said. Then and there I became his official Spanish translator, which allowed me to have first-hand experience of all the teachings that he imparted in Latin America. He would always speak for five to ten minutes and I could always translate almost word for word. Once someone commented to him that I was such a great translator, to which he answered, “It is because there is a connection with me; let him try that with someone else and see.”

I feel so blessed to have this connection which manifested itself again and again in my life. Two instances come to mind now. On one occasion I was having some health problems so I wrote to Sri Swamiji for advice. The moment I finished the letter I thought of certain yoga practices and started doing them. Some weeks later, a letter from Sri Swamiji in his own handwriting arrived telling me to do exactly the same practices that had come to my mind. In 1973, I attended

the last kriya yoga course given by Sri Swamiji. During the course sessions, questions would arise in my mind regarding the performance of techniques and as soon as I would formulate the question mentally, Sri Swamiji would answer it verbally, as if it were the appropriate instruction at the time.

Sri Swamiji's teachings came not only through his lectures or satsangs. One of the things I most cherished was the opportunity to be with him and see him act. I would watch him closely trying to imbibe the wisdom with which he managed the different situations of life. He would always make a passing remark or a very direct comment that captured the essence of that wisdom. From that I acquired the habit of thinking, 'How would Swamiji manage this', as part of my way of tackling life.

Being with Sri Swamiji was always a permanent source of knowledge. One time I was with him in Central America in the garden of the house we were staying in. We were walking, looking at different plants and flowers and then we sat down on a bench, and he said, "People are always trying to find gurus like Ramana Maharshi, Swami Sivananda or Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who are rare. They do not realize that all around there is another type of guru ready to give knowledge. The universe is full of them, such as plants, flowers, birds." On another occasion we were walking with Sri Swamiji on the grounds of the old BSY ashram, which was full of visitors to a yoga convention. Suddenly he turns around and says, "The most important thing a human being can achieve is to become a witness of all that he thinks and does. When he attains that, he can accomplish anything that he sets his mind on. He becomes extremely efficient. A lifetime is worthwhile if that is achieved."

Working with Sri Swamiji was extremely demanding. You had to analyze and observe each situation from every angle and anticipate what was coming. But on the other hand he would give everybody a chance. He was a master at using for his mission the talents that everybody had. With that, he not only expanded the mission for the good of humanity, but

also helped the person who worked for him by allowing him to express his full potential.

As a true guru, he always taught that personal transformation is only obtained through work on the part of the disciple. In January of 1990 I visited Sri Swamiji in Rikhia, only a few months after he arrived there. He had said that he was not a guru any more and that his disciples should consider him dead. I asked him if that were so, what would happen with his teachings to me. He answered that he had taught me everything and all I needed to do was practice. Fortunately the connection was never severed. I always remained and will always remain his disciple.

The last time I saw Sri Swamiji was in early 2008 on the last Rajasooya yajna. From that encounter two things are always present in my mind. One is that all he asked me was if I was enjoying myself. He always said that life was to enjoy. The other is that he told a group of disciples including myself, that we should not look outside, that everything was inside us and that we already had everything. All we had to do was to learn to look inside. Now all I hope is that I can be a worthy disciple of such a great guru.

—*Ignacio Copete, Colombia*

A time to give back

I met Sri Swamiji in 1971 when I was seventeen years old. After his short visit to Bogota, Colombia, in that year, I knew that my association with him was going to be a long-lasting one and that he was going to be a very important person in my life.

Over the years I have often wondered why I was so lucky to have had the opportunity to be in close contact with someone of his stature and wisdom; why I've been so fortunate to be given the opportunity to work for so many years helping him fulfil his mission; why Colombia was a part of his spiritual journey, a place so far away from Munger, so distant in kilometres and yet so close to his heart; and why

now, after his Mahasamadhi, I feel closer to him than ever, and feel his energy permeating everything related to the work of spreading his teachings of yoga.

During the years that he travelled to the West, I had the opportunity of being with him seven times in Colombia, where he not only visited Bogota, but also Medellin, Cali, Neiva, El Ocaso and San Agustin. I was with him in the Dominican Republic twice, in Puerto Rico, in the United States, in Spain, in France, in Italy and in Greece.

Whenever I could, I went to India to visit him, to attend his satsangs, to live in his ashram and to receive his darshan. In 1973, I participated in the World Yoga Convention in Munger and had the opportunity to be a student in his last kriya yoga course. Every time I went to see him, he had started a new project. He never stopped creating new avenues to teach, to help his disciples, and to care for his neighbours. I witnessed the growth of the institution he had created out of nothing, first the old BSY next to the Shiva temple, then I remember walking with him overseeing the construction of Ganga Darshan and then visiting him during the early years of Rikhiapeeth, when there were no buildings at all. I never imagined then that such a marvellous project was going to flourish around him.

He was my guru, my friend when I needed one, my companion when I felt alone, my guide when I was lost and my support in times of distress. Through his teachings all my questions were answered and all my requests fulfilled. He was the one who encouraged me to start the journey to discover my inner self. Not only his verbal guidance was there, but his life and actions were also a vivid example of his teachings. He had a peculiar way of teaching and we had to be alert to catch the hints that he was giving us all the time. I consider myself very lucky because I had many opportunities: I was his translator in some of his programs; I was asked to cook for him, to wash his clothes, and also to run some occasional errands for him. In every interaction that I had with Sri Swamiji, he found a way to teach me something practical.

Once, in one of his visits to Bogota, while walking through the ashram, he found a new electric typewriter, and with the excuse of trying it out he wrote: "A lucky man is he who takes an opportunity when it arises." Since then, I learned that one has to be aware of any opportunity and take advantage of it while one can.

He was very strict; with him everything had to be on time. He would arrive at the programs fifteen minutes early, to board a plane he would be there long before it was required. We had to be ready, we had to be alert, we had to think in advance, otherwise he would just leave us behind. Whenever there was an issue to be resolved, he would look at it from every angle, see all the possibilities, and have plan A, B and C. Life would have never caught him off-guard. His life was an example of that.

He loved world affairs, knew everything that was happening at the time. He was always up to date on world events. Sri Swamiji could talk on topics of war or peace, religion, science or social issues. He was a man of the world and at the same time a man from another world.

It is difficult to believe that such a man ever existed. His legacy will endure the ravages of time, his books will be there for generations to come and it is our duty as his disciples to see that the institutions he created continue to develop as per his wishes and commands. I feel that with opportunity comes obligation. All of us, the ones who had the opportunity to meet him, to be with him, to follow him, need now more than ever to work hard and make sure that his teachings are spread in their original form.

Now that he has entered into Mahasamadhi and I realize that I will never again be able to ask him any questions, I remember the answer he gave me once when I asked him to give me instructions on how to proceed with the work of yoga in Colombia. Sri Swamiji said: "Don't you receive my instructions mentally?" That made me think . . . and now I clearly understand the path I need to follow. I must be in tune with his energy, make myself available and ready to

proceed with his vision. I must pray to God to give me the openness, the purity of heart, the clarity of mind and the physical health to be able to help in carrying the mission given to him to 'spread yoga from shore to shore and from door to door'.

Now that he has transcended to another plane, a quote from the Bible comes to mind (*Ecclesiastes* 3:1–2):

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven.
A time to give birth, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted.

—*Maria Teresa Valencia de Copete, Colombia*

A saint guides my life

One day about forty years ago, a friend of mine and my husband's who had returned from Paris shared with us his experience of meeting the wisest and most important person he had ever met in his life. Moved by his stories, we invited this sage to Colombia. It was due to this good fortune that, in 1971, my husband and I met Sri Swami Satyananda.

Since the moment he arrived at the airport we wanted to be near him and hear everything he was telling and teaching. We were astonished by the way he explained to us the importance of both understanding and being at one with the mind. He showed us an easy way to be better human beings and to improve our personality. The yoga techniques he taught us – surya namaskara, yoga nidra and short meditations – captivated us.

Although at that time the concept of a guru was foreign to us, we knew we wanted to follow Sri Swamiji's teachings. When he said that he would send a teacher to Colombia if we could have a place for him to teach, I decided to dedicate my time to that objective. Soon after he sent us a teacher through whom he taught and guided us.

In 1973, the Golden Jubilee Convention to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Sri Swamiji's life and

teachings was being celebrated in Munger. We decided to organize a group in Colombia to be part of it. At that time, India was a country both far away and full of mystery. Fortunately we had Sri Swamiji guiding our every move: he indicated to us the best way to travel from New Delhi to Munger, the train we should take, how to find it and everything we might need. He took care of all the details of the trip, and after we arrived in Munger, he was like a father welcoming his children with infinite love and care.

At the end of the convention Sri Swamiji initiated us in mantra. We had a havan for the first time and I still remember it as one of the best experiences of my life. Our group took the kriya yoga course with Sri Swamiji and when it finished my husband and I went to him and asked: "Are you our guru? Can we have a spiritual name?" He smiled and told us: "Yes, I am your guru" and gave us our spiritual names. We came back to Colombia very happy because we had a master who would illuminate our journey at every moment.

Over the course of years, Sri Swamiji came to Colombia many times. We were always travelling with him, receiving his wise teachings and astute advice. We also travelled to India to see him at the ashram. On one of these trips in 1986 we had the most beautiful time. Sri Swamiji was with us all the time; we walked around the newly constructed Ganga Darshan, he showed us the place and explained to us the organization, the distribution and the use of every building. He also reached out to us on a personal level. My husband was very ill at the time and Sri Swamiji gave him advice on what to do, which diet he should follow, the type of job he should look for and how to work in a more relaxed way. Here, too, we felt as if we were in the home of a most loving father.

My husband passed away a few days after we returned to Colombia. At that moment I realized that through our discussions and with his advice, Sri Swamiji had been preparing my husband for a peaceful death and readying me to be strong and take on the difficulties I might encounter

after his death. We felt Sri Swamiji was guiding us step by step.

After some time, I remembered Sri Swamiji telling my husband that a diplomatic assignment could be a good job for him. Unfortunately, he didn't have the time to pursue this, but it gave me the idea to do it in his stead. I started to look into opportunities of taking a position in India and, to my good fortune I was nominated Ambassador to India. It was thanks to Sri Swamiji's blessings that I found this job since I had no previous diplomatic experience.

I went to India with two of my children to begin my work and immediately upon arriving we went to see Sri Swamiji in Rikhia. This was the best part of my tenure. Just meeting him I felt secure and confident; he knew how to make us see our best qualities and capabilities, putting any potential fear I may have had to rest. He gave me a red rose when we arrived. Since that moment roses bring to me the image of my guru and the security of knowing that he is always my support.

While in India I continued to see him almost every month. Just to be near him filled me with indescribable happiness, peace and security. Sometimes I would tell him about the different economical, political and social affairs taking place in Delhi and he would tell me stories about the history of India and the ways in which it had changed since its independence. All his stories carried a special message, instructing me in my diplomatic endeavours by encouraging me to explore every issue at length, while at the same time helping me to get to know and develop my own capabilities.

One of his greatest lessons was to respect all paths of life that led to spiritual development, be they religious, philosophical or any other special practice. In one of the yajnas celebrated in Rikhia, he invited priests and leaders from different religions to whom he showed great respect, participating in their rituals and sharing with them every thing he had at the Akhara.

The way in which he helped the community, educated the children and gave the women a place in society is a testament

to some of his greatest work. To see him treat the children with such tenderness, love and care awakened in us those same qualities – we wanted to develop at least a little of them to be nearer to him. He was like a mother taking care of her children and teaching them how to grow strong, healthy and full of knowledge.

He led us to meet the Divine Mother and to know how to invoke her and prepare ourselves to connect with her. He gave us the most valuable thing we can have in life: the awareness of the spiritual potential we possess and the way to develop them.

Ever since I heard stories of saints in my childhood, I wanted to meet one. I can now say that I have indeed met a saint and that he is the master who is with me and will be with me forever. He is the light of my life.

—*Swami Sivamaya Saraswati, Colombia*

The rhythm of his heart

In the timeless space . . . I met Sri Swamiji in his spring garden, under the shadow of a sacred tree . . . From his mahat state he shared the laws of the universe.

When teaching yoga, he opened for me the door to distant and unknown worlds, to unexpected constellations of cosmic lights and sounds.

I forgot the West and, following in his footsteps, travelled the East. I carry within me the sacred banks of the Ganges, the scent of sandal, and his voice like a flute attending the rising sun.

From his hands I received, unwittingly, the respected sannyasa tradition. Its silence still allows me to feel the rhythm of his heart inside me.

—*Swami Nigamananda Saraswati, Colombia*

The valley of lights

About thirty years ago, when I was wide awake in the middle of the night with a precise, clear and poetic sentence ringing in my head, I did not know that this feeling would be central to every stage of my life: “In the valley of Lights, the spell of darkness is broken.”

What seems important for me today is not so much the fact of receiving a message from somewhere one night, but to have linked it so clearly in my mind with Swami Satyananda and yoga which I was just discovering at the time. I was timidly progressing thanks to my first meetings with Swami Yogabhakti and Swami Pragyamurti, then Swami Nishchalananda and eventually Swami Niranjanananda in Munger. Without having met Swami Satyananda the connection was established through several teachers, and is as strong as ever today.

Without doubt the arrival of yoga in my life, followed by the adoption of a yogic way of life, led me progressively to the obvious: only a master can enlighten a fertile land and bring light and knowledge in one's life. Twenty years ago, I was taking pleasure in a life filled with ignorance. I wanted to enjoy the spell of being different from others, filled with odd and sometimes dangerous ideas.

Twenty years later, thanks to my encounter with Swami Satyananda, the original idea is gone. The feeling within me is one of resemblance and similar identity with the people around me and human beings in general, for we all have the same problems, obstacles to overcome, we all have wrong understanding and bugs in our formatted and imperfect memories.

In 1989, when I went to Munger, I wanted to meet Swami Satyananda. I knew he had left the ashram, but I was not aware that he was preparing to settle in Rikhia. I was clearly looking for a guide; the master who would lead my way. Obviously, I could not meet Paramahamsaji, but on the last day of my visit I met Swami Niranjanananda. I did not feel any frustration, on the contrary I left with a feeling of

fulfilment, perfectly directed towards the source of light I was looking for.

I think the guru-concept is separate from the individual. No doubt, the hand carrying the candle is different and personal for everyone, but it is the same light that enlightens the same, enabling one to see the same in a true continuum. When meeting Swami Niranjanananda for the first time, I felt connected with Paramahamsaji and the Saraswati lineage.

When I returned to France, the way I related to people around me gradually changed. It was no longer impossible to imagine that I could become self-confident and feel totally free; as well as feel accepted while speaking and beginning to communicate. Later on, I began to enjoy teaching. Swami Yoga Jyoti and I started to work on the creation of a yoga centre. Nothing was defined or forced, but simply accepted and evidently guided through the connection we renewed every year with Swami Niranjanananda, then through the twelve Sat Chandi Mahayajna with Paramahamsaji.

It was only after the Tyag Golden Jubilee Convention in 1993, that we were able to meet Swami Satyananda during a darshan we attended with Swami Nishchalananda. We discovered Paramahamsaji's stunning presence and strength during the first Sita Kalyanam. Once the connection is established with the master, the valley is still not enlightened forever. It requires constant work. The presence of the master in the yoga centre, which has grown into an ashram, is increasingly vivid, active and necessary. Some elements of the original sentence have been slowly deciphered, as if through the impact of a distillation and the removal of the first layers of ignorance. Without the guide's light and the strong presence of Paramahamsaji and Swami Niranjan, we would not have built anything. It is easier to remain idle and be carried away by the first layers of knowledge rather than by the will to deepen it.

We will forever remember our last meeting with Paramahamsaji. It was on 2nd of December 2009, when we were

celebrating his birthday. Just as we stood in front of him his smile widened, and he cast his eyes into ours in a unique, incredibly deep way. Afterwards, Paramahamsaji spoke about ecology and eco-rituality, and I felt he was in agreement with our concerns and the work we had initiated in France. We felt in perfect union with his vibration and will to see the concept of ecology applied worldwide as he had applied it for twenty years in Rikhia.

We saw the Rikhia Valley transform, and without doubt it perfectly illustrated the sentence I had heard that night in Brittany. It is a brilliant example of how the guru's light may be displayed and we wish for it to continue, and want to be part of it. In today's world, there is an endless number of dark valleys, but we hope the guru's light will be disseminated everywhere so that a new balance may arise between ecology and spirituality – one cannot exist without the other.

—*Swami Paramatma Saraswati, France*

He lived what he taught

It is almost impossible to write down a single experience with Paramahamsaji from the many years I have known him.

At the first encounter twenty-seven years ago in a large hotel in Switzerland he touched my soul, entered my life and took possession of my heart. A few weeks later I was his sannyasin and today I can see that all the years preceding were nothing but the preparation for that moment.

I found what I had been seeking since my childhood. He lived what he taught. He guided thousands of people with pure unconditional love and I gave my complete trust in him that he may guide me too.

Since a few years I can't see him, can't hear him, for I can't travel to India anymore. Instead of being sad I feel I am coming closer to him from day to day. I can recognize the attributes and skills he had kindled in me and how many faults such as pride, arrogance and others dissolve. I have tremendous gratitude for the treasure of my guru-disciple

relationship, which I am sure will not end with the death of the body.

—*Swami Prakashananda Saraswati, Germany*

The message of freedom

The first time I saw and heard Sri Swami Satyananda speak was in Singapore in 1981, just after we had moved there. In his lecture on the physical/biological effects of yoga I was impressed by his sharp scientific mind, but was far from recognizing his spiritual power. The next encounter with Sri Swamiji was prompted by my swelling ego. When Swami Atmananda, my beloved and revered teacher in Singapore, refused to initiate me into kriya yoga, of which I had vaguely heard, I decided to get it myself.

Packing up two of my little children, I took a flight to Australia to attend the yoga festival there. I soon sobered, however, when Sri Swamiji, despite being in the ashram, did not appear on stage for some days. Frantic chanting and excitement building up to an extent where my little son kept asking for the ‘yoga king’ changed nothing. When Sri Swamiji finally appeared on stage he gave a brief and matter-of-fact lecture stressing that yoga is not a religion, but a science. It goes almost without saying, that I did not get initiation into kriya yoga!

After four years with Swami Atmananda, the longing for guru dawned, while not quite knowing what I was looking for. Swami Atmananda had given me a mantra and spiritual name, but for initiation into karma sannyasa she urged me to go to Munger to the source, to Swami Satyananda. That was in 1985. When Swami Satyananda in this private session asked me why I wanted initiation, I did not know, even less was I able to speak. Why did I want initiation then? After confirming my guru mantra and changing my spiritual name from Yogadrishti to Divyadrishti, Sri Swamiji gave the following instructions, “Change nothing. Ask yourself ‘Who am I?’ and go a step further.” That was all.

What attracted me most about Sri Swamiji's teachings was his message of freedom – freedom to use one's own mind, to think for oneself, and above all to use common sense, freedom not to fight the mind but to accept everything, the good and the bad without judgement as a non-partial observer, and to witness when the observer became partial and judgemental. This attitude helps to get out of the guilt-trap in which many of us are caught.

Sri Swamiji epitomized freedom in an awe-inspiring way in his own life, shining like a mighty beam for us to emulate. Some examples come to mind: freedom to leave the fruits of his work behind when he left Munger, freedom to revolutionize encrusted beliefs and customs by inviting dignitaries from many different religions to the ashram in Rikhia, freedom to shake the entrenched convictions of villagers that women are inferior to men. Up to his last satsang he showed us his freedom to say the truth to anyone and everyone, when he admonished in a fiery speech to all present and in particular the parents of the kanyas and batuks of Rikhia, and told them to live a disciplined life, to be accountable to the younger generation and to be models for the children.

In 1991, I was first allowed to come to Rikhia to visit Swami Atmananda (Choti Swamiji, as she was called there) who had closed the Singapore ashram to follow her guru into seclusion. Very few people lived in the Akhara at that time and there was an inscription inside the Paramahansa Alakh Bara: 'Don't Come Back'. Bholenath, the German shepherd, was the fiery guardian to safeguard Sri Swamiji's seclusion. Visiting Rikhia almost yearly and having had dogs of my own, I tried to show off my doggy skills one day. While Sri Swamiji was taking a stroll around Sukhman side inspecting everything and enquiring lovingly about our comfort in travel and accommodation, I tried to attract Bholenath's attention by gazing at him and clicking my tongue. Master Bholenath gave me a good lesson – charging at me and biting me in the butt. All that remained was a black bruise and the humbling realization that learning is never finished.

Another incident which engraved itself in my mind from those times: I asked Sri Swamiji to bless the rudraksha mala which I used for kriya yoga, and he sternly replied, “I have done with this touching business!” No more was said.

One day Swami Satsangi called us to witness a sacrifice that Sri Swamiji was about to perform. We were allowed to look over the wall so as not to disturb his sadhana. After painting yantras and mandalas on the ground, Sri Swamiji took a big knife to cut, not the head of a goat, but a big pumpkin. That evening we ate a delicious pumpkin curry that Sri Swamiji had cooked for us. Since then, pumpkin has become my favourite dish.

Seeing Rikhia grow in these twenty years is nothing short of a miracle. Where once villagers were shy and their eyes seemed dulled by the scourge of poverty, one now encounters youngsters and elders alike with shining eyes and an amazing self-confidence. The openness with which Sri Swamiji experimented on how to uplift the downtrodden and neglected people of Rikhia Panchayat as part of a divine command is mind-boggling: building houses, teaching villagers how to grow vegetables, planting fast-growing trees in the Akhara for villagers to emulate, teaching them to take care of cows under the guidance of a veterinary swami, donating bicycles to girls so that they can get to school, employing girls and women in the Akhara to bring women out of the house, employing widows to chant the *Ramayana*, regular satsangs to villagers to open their minds, bringing out the creative potential and talents in the youngsters who were born after Sri Swamiji moved to Rikhia, and all this by the grace of God, the Divine Mother, which Sri Swamiji always stressed.

Who can forget Sri Swamiji’s powerful presence, his sparkling eyes, his love for laughter, his tender care for the kanyas . . . his vibrancy, his practicality, his humility, his simplicity . . . This all is our guru, unfathomable, all-pervasive, all-love.

—Sannyasi Divyadrishti, Germany

Rikhia-wale Baba

For any person, coming from outside Bihar, it is next to impossible to take a foothold in Bihar, not to talk about founding an organization or an ashram. Sri Swamiji did it *twice*! He became the Munger-Wale Baba and he became the Rikhia-Wale Baba.

How did he do it? I can only tell how he did it with me. He certainly didn't do it by performing big miracles. He did it in the way he lived and handled each and every situation in life, one by one, in a perfect, but simple manner. Each and every small thing was perfectly planned and executed, or changed in a second, if the situation required it. He was very conservative in some matters and absolutely revolutionary in others; he could be very soft and a second later very tough. In short, he was everything. Everything in one. He was what the situation required in that special moment. And most of all he was Mother! Vibrating this unconditional love in each and every action he did.

I know today, and I knew it then: we cannot know and we cannot appreciate the real value and blessings we received and are still receiving through him.

—Swami Vedananda Saraswati, Germany

A tribute to Paramahamsaji

The second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:55–72) ends with a description of the highest state of consciousness a human being can attain. “When your love is deep enough,” Sri Krishna has been telling Arjuna, “every selfish attachment falls away, and with it, all frustration, all insecurity, all despair.” Arjuna asks, enthusiastically, “How can I recognize such a person when I see him? What are the marks of the man who lives always in wisdom; completely established in himself? Tell me how he talks, how he acts, how he conducts himself when under attack?”

Sri Krishna replies, “He lives in wisdom who sees himself in all, and all in him. Whose love for the Lord of

love has consumed every selfish desire and sense craving tormenting the heart. Not agitated by grief, nor hankering after pleasure, he lives free from lust, and fear, and anger, fretted no more by selfish attachments. He is not elated by good fortune, nor depressed by bad. Such is the seer. When you keep thinking about sense objects, attachment comes. Attachment breeds desire. The lust of possession which when thwarted burns to anger. Anger clouds the judgment, and robs you of the power to learn from past mistakes. Lost is the discriminative faculty and your life is utter waste. But when you move amidst the world of sense, with both attachment and aversion freed, there comes the peace in which all sorrows end, and you live in the wisdom of the Self. The disunited mind is far from wise. How can it meditate? How be at peace? When you know no peace, how can you know joy? When you let your mind follow the siren call of the senses, they carry away your better judgment, as the cyclone drives the boat off the charted course to its doom. He is forever free who has broken out of the ego cage of I and mine, to be united with the Lord of Love. This is the supreme state. Attain thou this, and pass from death to immortality.”

For me, these verses summarize Paramahamsaji’s life. They are the key to his Self-transformation. It is one thing to read the *Bhagavad Gita* or translate it into another language, and quite a different thing to translate it into daily living. The first is an intellectual exercise, and no matter how much talent and scholarship may be involved, it doesn’t come anywhere near the second. Because to live the *Gita* as Paramahamsaji did in his daily life, necessitates reaching down to the utmost depths of one’s consciousness, leading to a complete transformation of character and conduct.

If we attempt to understand the *Bhagavad Gita* as a manual for daily living, then we are able to understand Paramahamsaji better. But it is not possible to comprehend the *Gita* in this way, without endeavouring, as Paramahamsaji did, to put it into practice every day of our life. He was a

shining example of all the great qualities mentioned in the *Gita* and yet he lived the life of a simple man with so many human qualities.

Paramahamsaji said, "For me, it is more important for a man to be a man than a saint. It is easy to be a venerable man, a guru, anything exalted, but not a man. It is very difficult to give; it's most difficult to love, and it's impossible to understand. Today, man has reached the point where he finds himself incapable of realizing his fundamental humanity. If a man can be a man, he can be everything, because to be a man, he has to kill everything in him.

Before you can play music on a bamboo flute, the bamboo must be hollowed out. In the same way, you have to empty yourself. You have to bear the kicks, face the criticism and live with the passions. You must end your fears and be prepared to be persecuted and abused. You should not expect to be loved or honoured; that is imperative."

In the early days I spent with him in BSY, Munger, his every minute was given over to others. This began with the steady stream of disciples, devotees and visitors who came from all over the world for every conceivable reason: to get an interview; to settle some question; to argue with his opinions; to get help on disciplining an unruly child; to settle marital relationships; to seek spiritual light or knowledge.

He made a point of always discovering a person's interests and skills, and had that ability to draw out the very best in a person. He brought out people's qualities, their gifts, so enabling them to express themselves creatively. Their work then became a sadhana; their profession became a sadhana; their artistic talent; developing their abilities became their spiritual sadhana, and took them closer to their goal. People just blossomed, flowered, under his touch, under his glance. He had just one attitude in his mind, to do good to everybody.

During that time he had not the slightest privacy. Everything he did was observed by those around him, so that

his life was beautifully transparent. Paramahamsaji once said that a saint's life should be an open book. Nothing should be hidden. In his own life, in the ashram or during his many tours, indeed nothing was. Everything he did, he did in front of others. His solitude, if at all, was taken in the midst of many. It was only much later after he left Munger and moved to Rikhia that this changed.

In the middle of all this apparent chaos, however, Paramahamsaji kept order by an exact inner attention to detail and to time. He was punctual to the minute. In fact, he always arrived at least ten minutes before his meetings or programs. He would never keep anyone waiting.

In the ashram, Paramahamsaji's day began very early, around three or four, and sometimes even earlier, to take advantage of the cool, quiet Indian morning. This is the time of the day when the mind is naturally most at peace. I recall when I was getting up very early to do my kriya sadhana, no matter how early I got up, when I crossed the space between my room and the hall where I did my practice, Paramahamsaji was invariably standing at the door just watching, and showing me, by his quiet and immovable presence, that he was supporting me in what I was doing.

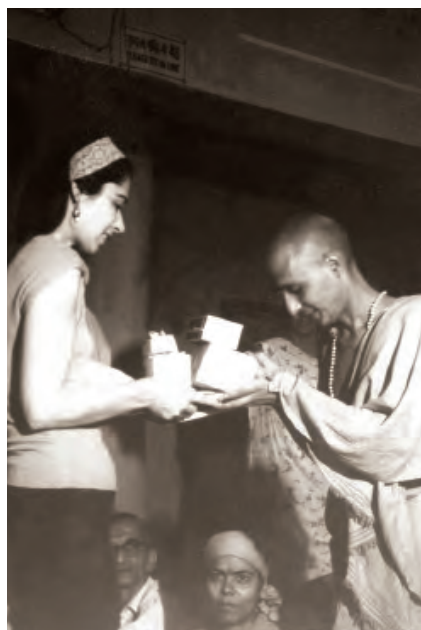
The ashram was always an odd collection of many men, women, and children, from different parts of the world: swamis, sannyasins, devotees, visitors, or guests. They were all so varied in their backgrounds and dispositions, that I heard them referred to once as the ashram menagerie. This was because everywhere Paramahamsaji went, he attracted people whose love for him released tremendous reserves of loyalty, courage and selfless service, which utterly transformed their lives. Whenever we came into his presence, even if it was just a few moments, something was always said, something was always done, something was always felt, that uplifted us, and gave us strength to continue.

It became apparent, within a very short space of time, that some of the rumours that I'd heard earlier in the ashram, before I'd actually met Paramahamsaji, that he knew

everything – one’s motive, one’s thoughts, one’s words, one’s deeds – was actually true; it became a living reality to me, and I knew that I could not do anything, or think anything, without his knowledge of it. Various experiences brought this to light.

Once in Switzerland, we were at a convention in Zinal, and I was invited to have lunch with Paramahamsaji. After his morning satsang, we had been invited to an Indian devotee’s room in the hotel where his wife was preparing special Indian dishes. Now, Paramahamsaji always left a lecture with tremendous speed; he very seldom walked slowly and waited there for people to come up and congratulate him, or praise him in any way. He left quickly, which meant, of course, those who wished to keep up with him, and go on to the next program or the next function, or whatever it was, had to move almost as quickly. So we were racing out of the lecture hall, when I was confronted by a girl in a very emotional state, and she said, “Oh please. I must have a word with you.” I said, “Could we have that word later on, because I’m in a bit of a rush at the moment.” She said, “It’s terribly important. I have to speak to you now.” So I said, “Well, I really am in quite a hurry, but straight after lunch, if you will come back here.” She said, “Oh please, I have to speak to you now. It’s terribly important.” I said, “What is it?” She said, “I want to have my head shaved.” I said, “Ok, I’ll arrange that for you after lunch.” She said, “Oh, please, I have to find out where, and how, and when. It’s terribly important.” By that time I was starting to get worried because so much time had passed, perhaps not so much time had, but in Paramahamsaji’s life, in a few seconds, one does a lot. So I became quite abrupt with her, and said, “I said after lunch,” and I rushed up to the luncheon room. The door was closed. I knocked on the door. The host opened the door and greeted me with a smile, and just as I was about to put one foot in the room, Paramahamsaji who was already seated at the table, spun around and said, “No,” in no uncertain tone, “No! Not her.” So the host, in the middle

















between both of us, politely smiled and closed the door, and I stepped back. I knew immediately why he had said that, because I hadn't taken sufficient care of the girl's problem. I had not handled the situation correctly. My attitude had not been correct. So I knew what I had to do. I went down and found her and arranged for the shaving.

Paramahamsaji's voice was always within a certain range of pitch. It never went too high; it never went too low. It was melodious and sweet. He never raised his voice, even when he wanted to get a point across. The tone of his voice was always pleasing and gentle to the ear. It seemed soft, but it carried far.

There are times when nothing one can say is as powerful as saying nothing. To argue brings one down to the level of those with whom one argues. Silence convinces another of their folly, and one wishes they had not spoken so quickly.

I remember an incident in France after Paramahamsaji had just delivered a magnificent lecture. Hundreds of people came. Everyone seemed inspired and uplifted, freer from their difficulties and problems. We were leaving the hall, and trying to make our way through the throng of people who had collected in the foyer, when a man burst forward and confronted Paramahamsaji. He said that he didn't agree with various points in Paramahamsaji's lecture.

He confronted Paramahamsaji quite aggressively on various points in the lecture that he thought were incorrect. Suddenly the whole foyer was quiet. Everyone was standing still and waiting. The man raised his voice so high, as he put forward his point of view that he could be heard by all very clearly. Paramahamsaji just stood there, very still, watching him, with a sweet expression on his face. Whenever the man paused, Paramahamsaji just said, "Yes, that's right. Mm." Or he said nothing. The man went on and on for about five minutes, and Paramahamsaji just said, "Mm. Yes, that's right." Nothing else. He agreed with the man. After a while the man's anger and aggression died down, and he just remained silent watching Paramahamsaji, while

Paramahamsaji watched him, and the rest of us watched them both.

There was silence in the whole foyer and eventually the man began asking Paramahamsaji's opinion on what he had just said on the *Gita*. When the whole discussion was over, Paramahamsaji quietly adjusted his robe around his shoulders, and moved on.

We all followed not knowing what to say or do. Paramahamsaji said nothing more on the matter. There was no debate, no comment on what had happened, and no futile conversation. In all the years I have known him, I have never heard Paramahamsaji say anything unnecessarily. He never speaks just for the sake of speaking, but for the sake of those present. We all remembered this incident long after it was over, but Paramahamsaji forgot it immediately. In a world where there was so much to be done, and to be done quickly, there was no time afforded to petty slights.

Above are just some of the experiences I have been fortunate enough to live through with Paramahamsaji. Definitely it is not possible for me to make an accurate assessment of the personality of Paramahansa Satyananda with whom I lived for only a short period of time, but who was responsible for transforming my whole life.

—*Swami Sivamurti Saraswati, Greece*

He is everywhere

Sri Swamiji was a conqueror of hearts. He could uplift the mood; transform it to joy, tearing apart the guise of seriousness and life's lila. His contact penetrated all levels of your existence. In so many ways he could lead you, open you, widen you and correct you. His grace flowed bounteously towards openness and acceptance.

When Sri Swamiji came to Greece in 1984 for his tour, I found myself driving the open jeep, with him sitting next to me. Although it had been planned that he would sit in the back of the car, on the right side, he changed everything in a moment.

Throughout the journey he analyzed in detail what was going wrong with the plugs, the ignition, the petrol, the circulation system and the entire well-functioning car. While he was talking, he seemed to be channelling all of this outer description of the car to the inner condition of my body. Indeed, at that time I was having problems with my digestive system and some other health problems. By analyzing the mechanical functioning of the car, he was analyzing me at that time and reconditioning my whole physical system. It was an inconceivable way of 'repairing' which he applied.

We reached the square of Syntagma, in the centre of Athens, with Swamiji's hotel as our destination. We were about three hundred metres away in slow, blocked traffic, when he suddenly opened the door, flew outside, and with quick steps, almost running and turning towards us at the same time, gave us a beautiful smile of innocence, purity and playfulness, leaving all of us dumbfound. He broke all the patterns of our plans and procedures. He showed us the beauty and the spark of life through the unexpected, the uncommon, the unforeseen and, finally, what was most practical!

This is the way Sri Swamiji used to work and still works with us. If you open up, he gives you a thousand wings to fly along his side, floating in the air, above existence, in ranges your eyes have never seen before, your ears have never heard before and your body has never felt before.

In Rikhia, after Sri Swamiji's Mahasamadhi, it felt as if each one of us was initiated by him. When sprinkled with holy water, it was he who was spreading his blessings. While looking at us from a higher plane, although we couldn't realize it, he left his heritage and stock to us. Now, from where he is, he can see us, hear us and talk to us, through any person, through a bird, a flower, through the wind. If we listen closely, we can have the revelation of his presence every moment. We should be ready to receive his messages, his commands and his guidance, to continue his work in this

life and pass it on to the future generations, widening the heritage he left to us, which time won't be able to erase.

—*Swami Aparokshananda Saraswati, Greece*

Titanic

We got to know Sri Swamiji in 1989 through his books, the Greek ashram and Swami Sivamurti's talks which were full of love and devotion to him. We would listen in silence and bow our heads with respect and heartfelt gratitude, wishing to meet him sometime and touch his lotus feet.

In 1998, he entered our life unexpectedly, when he blessed our wedding, as Sita and Rama in Rikhia during Sita Kalyanam and since then he is living in our hearts.

The days rolled by in his physical presence and filled us with happiness and love. His personal care and interest in every detail regarding preparations made us feel at home in Rikhia, the residents were our family and he a caring hospitable father, looking after his children and meeting in a unique way their real needs.

"What is your profession?" he asked the future Sita. "Interior decorator." "And what do you do?" he asked the future Rama. "Marine engineering!" With his special expressive smile he said, "I saw the movie 'Titanic'." What a significant comment! Since then our life not only got shipwrecked, but changed totally, became meaningful and acquired a purpose which he infused.

Every day of that period was full of surprises for the mind and the emotions. His presence dispersed all worries and difficulties of our unquiet minds, providing us through his every magic movement, look or expression with the message: serve, love and give. The number of people arriving was increasing daily as well as the requirements for prasad. When at some point the kitchen in charge informed him that the prasad was diminishing and would not be enough for all people, he told him to continue giving and finally everybody received prasad!

Softer than a blossom in love and compassion and more powerful than thunder in matters of principles and beliefs, he taught us the essence of real life in a unique manner. His tireless activity and energy inspired everyone while different things were happening simultaneously. Sri Swamiji spoke in a unique way and he expressed the absolute truth, *satyam*, with which he identified in a natural way, while in every day matters he was practical and creative. His physical presence and the touching of his feet created a deep commotion and feeling and every contact with him uplifted us spiritually and channelled our worldly desires in a harmonious way. With the passing of the years, as we used to go every year to Rikhia, we became more connected with him.

It often crossed our minds that this magnificent and admirable man could easily be an emperor capable of conquering the world, had he chosen to concentrate his energy on the pursuit of worldly success. Instead he chose to conquer the inner towers of egoism with the fall of which the individual is elevated towards the Divine. Through yoga he conquered the hearts of the people, following the instructions of his guru, and year by year we felt that Sri Swamiji had given a certain spirit and attitude of life to the world. It is not only the personality of Swami Satyananda, the man and yogi, but furthermore the Satyananda spirit which is our heritage in life. We live with that spirit enveloping us, manifested with sanctity, a lot of love, service and care towards our fellow human beings, as he taught and is continuing to teach by taking care of the needs of everybody.

A simple almost Spartan phrase ‘go on’, was enough to change the direction of our life, filling us with optimism and confidence, to extinguish every sign of hesitation and to establish our faith, so we could build our lives’ ship and steer it to the safe port of Satyam.

Beloved guru, sannyasi, yogi, man and father allow our actions to become worship to you.

Love and devotion.

—*Sannyasins Durgashakti and Vedamurti, Greece*

Inside me

I was always saying that, for me, Sri Swamiji is the heart of our tradition, transferring the spiritual energy to all of us, through every beat.

He taught me, at my early steps to perceive the world in a different way. It wasn't necessary to say anything with words; it wasn't necessary to be alone, our mind and our heart was one. Through each of his movements, through each of his words, it was like he was talking only to me. The crowd would disappear; he was there only for me.

I found myself where truth is established. I found myself where you experience the truth, where if you live it even once you know it. Everything around us is fading and takes another form; they are falling like sandcastles. It was like he was saying to you, "Go ahead; don't be scared, I gave you the experience, now you know where you're going. What you are leaving behind is not important, but what you are looking for is."

I feel a part of him; he is established in my heart and all of my being. He is with me, inside me, inside every cell of mine. Even to think of him is enough, to feel his presence, his energy. It is this boundless love that I feel as soon as I think of him. It is his shoulders I lean my head on to rest and it is then that all the burdens of the world disappear and all that is left is peace and calmness. He is my shelter, my faith, my lighthouse.

Please stay with me. Stay and continue to guide me. Do not stop. Perhaps, once your presence did scare me, now I'm looking for it.

I am waiting for your guidance to lead me home, where you are waiting for me, where you are waiting for everybody. How has he influenced my life? He just made it his own.

I thank Swami Sivamurti, Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi, who made it possible and brought us close to him.

—*Sannyasi Poorna Vidya, Greece*

The legacy of Swami Satyananda

Swami Satyananda Saraswati was one of the foremost yogis of contemporary India. He attained Mahasamadhi on 5th December 2009, and the events leading up to it are vividly described in *Yoga* magazine (January–February 2010). There are lessons in his death for all of us, as much as there are lessons from his life.

Swami Satyananda left the world in the manner, place and time of his own choosing, what our scriptures describe as *iccha mrityu*. He simply inhaled and with a deep breath withdrew his *pranas* from his body, seated in *padmasana* and in meditation. No wonder there was no mourning following his death because even in death he had achieved perfection.

Through his death he has given us what can best be described as a ‘doctrine for death’, and thereby, also a doctrine for living. The message is clear: if you want to die well, then you must live in accordance with certain principles. Consequently, this implies that if you know how to die, then you also know how to live.

What are these principles that gave the Mahayogi *iccha mrityu*, and which we all need to inculcate in our daily life? First, is *nishkama karma*, perfect action by dedicating the outcome to God and without taking credit for it. For over half a century Swami Satyananda worked quietly in Munger, Bihar, and Rikhia village, Jharkhand, and created two of the finest temples: the Bihar School of Yoga, a yoga institute dedicated to acquiring wisdom, and Rikhiapeeth, a medium for connecting with other people through service, love and sharing.

For over two decades before his death, Swami Satyananda worked relentlessly with the tribal population in Rikhia panchayat empowering the *kanyas* and *batuks*, the young girls and boys, with the tools that would help them build their lives and also serve society. He was always humble about these sterling achievements. No pomp, no show. It reminds one of the famous quote of former US President Harry Truman: “It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”

This brings us to the second principle: *seva*. According to the guru, if we only focus on gaining wisdom and do not let it flow into our actions, then that wisdom is of no use. Wisdom is enhanced and grows by sharing. This was the main teaching of Sri Swamiji and he was eminently able to walk his talk.

The third lesson is leadership. Swami Satyananda not only created two world-class institutions, but also groomed the next generation of leaders to take forward the good work. His successor, Swami Niranjanananda, has already been freed from his social and institutional obligations so that he can concentrate full-time on *sadhanas* and carrying the legacy forward. Swami Satyasangananda is the *Peethadishwari* of Rikhiapeeth and Swami Suryaprakash, who has been groomed by Swami Niranjanananda, is the president of the Bihar School of Yoga. There is no parallel for such perspective leadership planning in the world today.

Last but not least, Swami Satyananda taught us how to be fearless by developing the right attitude towards death. According to him, death is not the culmination of life. In fact, he wrote: “The steps of life begin at the threshold of death. Death is the river that unites two streams of life. O priests of death! Through the voice of the funeral fires, through the melody of the funeral pyres, sing the sweet song of the union of life.”

In Kali Yuga, when all of us are getting more and more cynical and desperate, the life and death of the Mahayogi Sri Swami Satyananda shines like a beacon of hope and a source of inspiration for all of us. His biggest legacy for us householders is his doctrine for death. All we have to do is to cull our strategy for living from this. Do we have the humility and the wisdom to understand and more importantly implement this? Well, nothing stops us.

—*Manjula Joshi, Delhi*

The immortal Satyam: a tribute

There is no denying the fact that ordinary mortals may never again behold Paramahansa Satyanandaji as many of us were blessed to.

No longer may we share his beatific smile, hear his soulful chanting of mantras and singing of bhajans, or see the spark of fun in his eyes. Nor any longer may we touch his lotus feet, talk with him, laugh with him or feel caressed in our soul by his beatific earthly presence.

The lack of his presence in the everyday world will be felt by us all but in many different ways. For his *paramashishyas*, supreme disciples – Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi – he lives on in their spiritual embodiment and manifestation. For other shishyas worldwide, the Paramahansa lives on via these paramashishyas. For his bhaktas, devotees, who constantly sought his *sanidhya*, togetherness, he lives on in acts of worship, enhancing our deeds and dreams with the immortal power of blessings.

How about others like me who understood his spiritual call and the mission of yoga, but remained deprived of the privilege to be among his disciples or followers? How may they grasp the enduring message of his Mahasamadhi? There is no question that folks like me will continue to feel forever ‘orphaned’ as beings now rendered hollow by his absence in this world and who must now continue to somehow live on and with a sense of endless, overwhelming, all-pervasive and tragic loss.

In testifying fully to my own inconsolable bereavement, and in bidding an adieu to Beloved Satyam, I have to address him thus rather than in impersonal terms as ‘Sri Swamiji’. I urge Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi to please allow me to salute him thus.

But how may one bid an adieu to Beloved Satyam: who and what has gone and from where to where, so that we may speak thus? True, the *sakar*, specifically framed mortal form, Satyam is no more, but his ways of being speak to us of larger contexts than suggested by the fact of mortality, not the succumbing to biological death but rather

its transformation into the event of a future memory and history. His Mahasamadhi signifies an authentic choice and act of *tyaga*, renunciation, of the body – an accession into a universe of nirakar presence.

Satyam follows the great spiritual tradition of true renunciates in which gurus do not succumb to, but rather choose the time, manner, and circumstance of shedding their mortal body. But he further transforms this tradition as well: neither *punar-janma*, rebirth in an endless cycle of births and deaths, nor the Second Coming of a singular messiah constitutes the meaning and message of his Mahasamadhi.

To understand this otherwise simple fact and feat is to grasp the enormous difference between living for oneself, one's kith and kin, and living for the sake of the redemption of the endlessly suffering humanity. This is what Vishwaprem, among the first of Satyam's initiates, describes in a felicitous phrase evoking the sense of endless and enduring 'spiritual journey', a sublime itinerary of life amidst death as well as beyond death. Vishwaprem's distinctive initiation by Sri Swamiji in 1958 via the letter narratives (published in *Lessons on Yoga Part 1*, 1962, and later in *Steps to Yoga*), already speak to us of Satyam's innovation of a spiritual tradition in terms of the practices of mantra diksha, the practices that at once individualize the ways of yogic cosmic communication and constitute transcendence beyond the finite notions of time and space.

The imagery of a spiritual journey helps us better grasp the meaning of a verse in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:21) that says to us all thus:

*Vaasaamsi jeernaani yathaa vihaaya, navaani grihnaati
naroparaani;*

*Tathaa shareeraani vihaaya jeernaa, nyanyaani samyaati
navaani dehee.*

Just as a 'man' puts on fresh clothes after discarding worn-out ones, so does the embodied Self, discarding worn-out bodies, proceeds to take up new ones.

This sartorial metaphor remains rather inadequate, to say the least! If for all ordinary humans, death and dying are only the processes marking forever biological rebirthing, *navani dehi*, this is not the sense of the event of a Mahasamadhi. Mahasamadhi does not continue this Eternal Return of the Same, as it were, to which non-spiritual beings forever remain condemned. I know that Beloved Satyam recited with a great purpose the great mystic poem of Shankara: Punarapi jananam, punarapi maranam . . . Satyam thus underscores the fact of human finitude; yet at the same moment he invites us all to translate this fact into a feat of transcendence.

Death and dying remain for ordinary mortals a cruel fact terminating forms of life that they otherwise fully cherish; true, many also cherish acts of suicide, and many others invite death by neglecting acts of ethically decent ways of sensible living – via *vyasana*, addiction, and *vyabichara*, licentious amoral ways of life, or *duragraha*, the practices of moral evil that hurt themselves and others. Such folks indeed choose death over life but in no way akin to acts and feats of Mahasamadhi. The true renunciate lives and dies to assist the vulnerable and suffering others in living the life of the Soul.

Indeed, we may only begin our labours of acknowledging our endless debt to Beloved Satyam. To strike a personal note, I had the privilege of communion with him from the very first days in Mumbai in December 1961 (and Vishwaprem still earlier in 1954 when Swamiji was in Sivananda Ashram), and later in Rajnandgaon in 1962 (with Satyabrat and Ma Dharmashakti in their house, where we were further privileged to play with Niranjana, an infant prodigy). Satyam emerged for us as a more than an extraordinary yogic persona, but rather as a deeply caring soul who remained concerned with the amelioration of here-and-now suffering peoples.

For Satyam, and this needs a full reiteration indeed, the renunciate life was never any itinerary of individualistic spiritual journey for personal salvation, *moksha*, but rather a

mode of accomplishing redemption from human and social suffering. This is what for Satyam constituted the signature tune of becoming and being a guru. For beloved Satyam, guru-ness remained always a work in progress – points of departure rather than the final points of arrival – that summoned a constant companionship towards the suffering and vulnerable others.

What always attracted me to Satyam was his infinite *karuna*, compassion and care, for the ‘living dead millions of humans who in their lifetimes remain exposed to countless social and political death’. His true message for all is just this: help the living dead to live a life of spiritual dignity.

The sakar Satyam reminds us that a guru thus always becomes so and remains worthy of this status only because she or he remains forever a shishya. Thus, the Rikhia Ashram also becomes a Sivananda centre, a *tirthasthan*, the site of spiritual journey or place of pilgrimage, reuniting forever the past gurus and their spiritual successors and also constituting the sites of a renaissance of yoga – an endless continuation of guru-shishya parampara, a tradition of continuity amidst change in which death and dying constitute the signature for the acts and feats of continuation and renewal of the life of the Spirit.

It is this profound bonding that singularly marks out the figuration that we name as Satyam. Satyam is thus both an individual name and a process of spiritual regeneration that remains uninterrupted by the forms of biological and social death. Satyam thus lives on within each one of the lives that he touched, nurtured, and spiritually caressed, as constantly provoking us all, and each in our own way, to endeavour to continue on the path of our infinite ‘spiritual journey’.

He descended thus from the lofty heights of Sivananda Ashram to the flood-ridden and ravaged plains of Bihar. For Satyam, helping suffering peoples everywhere constituted the signature and the event of that something that we commonly name as ‘spirituality’. He believed profoundly that swamis and sadhus should be there always amidst, and

help the suffering and vulnerable peoples. He renovated the classical yoga traditions in terms of a Buddhist virtue of *karuna* – the compassion for the disadvantaged, dispossessed, and deprived humanity everywhere in the world. In this sense, Satyam, for me, then constitutes the energy of the principle of cosmic Bodhisattva.

This marks the enormity of his achievement now further fully manifest at Rikhia on the Sita Kalyanam events. He gave a spiritual kiss of life to India's eternally suffering humanity. No one may fail to return from these and related events such as the *anna danam*, gift of food, *vastra danam*, gift of clothing, *vidya danam*, not just *akshara-pradanam*, endowment of literacy especially to indigenous girls and women, but learning and education for life in various precious ways, and the gifts of *swalamban shakti*, powers of self-reliance in the pursuit of life and livelihood, including for those living with disability.

To put plainly and rather poorly, without the least bit of an overstatement, Satyam constituted for the suffering and vulnerable peoples a single-person spiritual equivalent of the Planning Commission of India. He did not plan on paper, but in everyday deeds. This is the significance of his enormous achievement, one that now fully lives on further through Swami Niranjan and Swami Satsangi, enormously blest with the task and mission to keep this great heritage alive and not just for and in India, but worldwide.

This is why Satyam emerges as a much larger spiritual figuration than a swami or even as a paramahansa. In so doing, he truly inaugurates a momentously welcome breach in customary Hindu/Indian traditions of spiritual leadership.

In this he was at one with the great Kabir for whom a 'swami' justified this status by remaining always a true servant of the suffering humanity. When Satyam soulfully sang *Man lago mero Ram fakiri mein*, I always wondered what 'fakiri' signified.

Now I have solved this riddle, with the help of the great Kabir who said:

*Had tape so auliya, behad tape so pir, had-behad dono tape,
uska naam fakir.*

Translated rather poorly, this suggests that while important yet relatively ‘minor’ spiritual figurations like *auliya* overstep some worldly thresholds, and the more spiritually refined persona – *pir*– may question the sense of these limits – it is only the transcendent figure of a fakir who may help us all to overcome the very idea of limits, *had-behad dono tape*.

Adieu, from Vishwaprem and me, Beloved Fakir Satyam!

—Upendra Baxi, Delhi

My lifeline forever

I am who I am today because of Sri Swamiji’s blessings. Whatever he said to me I am slowly understanding. I do not feel that he has gone. His presence is palpable in my daily life, now, as it has been everyday since 1976, when I first went to Ganga Darshan.

I started classes initially for my arthritis, and they changed me. I felt that I was on another plane. Just through the pawanmuktasana series, I could not believe what was happening to me. It was an experience of illumination and I felt that my life had a purpose.

Everyday I would be at the ashram and have Sri Swamiji’s darshan. He had all the time in the world for me. I felt renewed with energy and at the same time like a child being held by her mother. He was tireless and always smiling. I would ask him a new question daily. His satsangs were like a feast as they eliminated all doubts.

Nothing can last forever. When I found out that we were moving from Munger to Chennai I told Sri Swamiji. His response was, “This is very good news, now you will become a yoga acharya. You will spend the day here taking classes and then you will teach yoga.” I was dumbstruck as I had never thought of it; I had a different image of myself. I loved the idea and I took to my classes like a duck takes to water.

The days just flew by. I learnt and learnt and it was the most enjoyable process. I went through *Asana, Pranayama, Mudra, Bandha* and *Meditation from the Tantras*. I sat in the library and read all the texts. I made copious notes as I could not afford to buy all the books. During darshan Sri Swamiji never asked about my progress. I had so many questions and he answered them patiently. He spoke about the guru-disciple relationship at length. I listened but did not understand everything as I do now. It was as if I was star-struck and the wisdom was seeping into me.

On the last day I received my certificate and I was given all the books published by BSY. I could not believe that I had been given this cache of treasure. I had hungered for them and now I had all this precious knowledge within my reach.

Sri Swamiji said the guru was always there for you and the lifeline never disconnected. From the first day of interacting with Swamiji I felt that my umbilical cord was connected to him. He said that when he thought of his guru, he would think of his slippers on his head – Swami Sivananda had huge feet. Whenever I was distressed I would see Sri Swamiji's face and my angst would be reduced.

I went to Chennai in 1979 and started teaching yoga with Sri Swamiji's blessings. I never looked back and specialized in teaching therapeutic yoga to women and creative yoga to children.

I organized two yoga conferences in Chennai and the doors just opened for us. The conferences were a success and people were clamouring for more from Sri Swamiji. People came to hear him in their hundreds. He lectured at the Sanskrit College in Sanskrit and the audience was spellbound.

I returned to Munger three times. In 1980, I attended the kriya course which a hundred Colombians had come for. They brought their own coffee and we got sweet, black coffee every morning and evening. Sri Swamiji would sit in his tent and I spent every afternoon there. I pressed his feet which was such an honour as he did not like people to touch him.

He would tell us stories every afternoon and always answered our queries. For my sons he gave me boxes of cookies to take back. Every visit Sri Swamiji just gave and gave.

Sri Swamiji's inspiration and guidance have enabled me to accomplish many things. At every seminar I conduct I can feel Swamiji's presence. If I falter I just pray to him and I remain connected. Today, I bow my head and fold my hands humbly in gratitude.

—*Nalini Sahay, Delhi*

Dimensions of a master

When I first went to Munger thirty-five years ago I was a *grihasthi*, a householder, and still I am a *grihasthi*. The only transformation is my coming into contact with Swami Satyananda.

I was introduced to Swami Satyananda in 1971. He asked me, “Dadi, what is it that you require?” so I told him that I was steadily losing my memory. He said, “That’s all?” I was absolutely amazed, but fortunately or unfortunately he was about to go on a world tour. He said that after that, in two years, he would come and solve my problem.

Within four months, Swamiji called to say he was cutting short his tour, and we should collect him from the airport. The moment he saw us he said, “All of you, come to Munger. I am going to start a kriya yoga course.” I had no idea what kriya yoga was, nor had I sat for so many hours in my life.

Classes started at 3.30 in the morning with Swamiji. At 3.31 the door would be locked and he would start. During the first two or three days my back started giving me trouble, everything started giving me trouble, but I had the feeling that this is was my only solution, because the moment I saw Swami Satyananda I knew that he had come to me from the Lord. I thought to myself, ‘Just stick to him, come what may, just be with him and you will see what he can do’. So to me Swami Satyananda was next to God and I still believe that he is next to God.

Once we started, Swamiji told us that within a few days we would be able to sit comfortably. After two days I could sit straight through the day, for six to seven hours. That is how my training with Swami Satyananda started. It was an intensive course and by the time the course was over I started getting my memory back, very steadily, and I felt that I had come to the place that I had wished for. This is how I was cured.

After this event I never talked to Swami Satyananda about it, and he never talked to me about it. So I am completely blank as to how it happened. It is a miracle, whatever people say. Perhaps Swamiji would not agree, but to me it is a miracle in my life.

Two years later there was a convention in Munger, and I was invited two weeks beforehand for seva. Once the convention was over I told Swamiji, "I am going back to Bombay." He said, "Just start teaching." I said, "Teaching? Who do I teach? Where do I teach?" All these questions were going on in my mind. Then he said, "No, just start teaching. Do you know why? Because when the swamis go to Mumbai everyone says they have come to collect guru dakshina, but when you start teaching they will see that there are householders who can do the same job that the swamis do. I tell you, start."

Behind me was a very dynamic lady, and we had been friends for over fifty years. She must have heard Swami Satyananda telling me this. On the plane to Mumbai she quietly told me, "Dadi, you start teaching." I said, "Start teaching, where? First of all get me a place, secondly get me students and then perhaps I might think about it, but just now what will I do? I know that I must obey him but I just don't know what to say." She said, "Tell me the day and my place is there for you." "Fair enough," I said, "Students?" She said, "I have three students ready for you." That is how I started teaching. Today roughly sixty students come and go. Absolutely anybody can come, anybody can take lessons and leave or anybody can stay. I have students who are now

teachers. They have joined me and we are doing good work as far as yoga science goes.

Yoga has meant everything in my life. If I had not met Swami Satyananda, I would not have learned yoga. Perhaps I would be in the meadows somewhere. With no memory at all, how can anybody function? So yoga means everything to me, it is very precious.

Nowadays, many yogas are taught in Mumbai. Everywhere you see signboards with different names, but students know that what we teach is different. We teach Swami Satyananda Yoga, classical yoga. According to Swamiji it is known as composite yoga: asana, pranayama, mudras, bandhas, meditation and relaxation, all in one session. This is how my life is; prayers on one side, yoga on the other side, and then everything just flows by His grace and I am content and happy. No other yoga school has a better curriculum or teachers than the Bihar School of Yoga. Also no other yoga school can give you so much love that you feel, “Not only am I a member of the family, I am much closer than a member.”

Spiritual and material life are not two separate lifestyles, they are absolutely complementary and supplementary. When we start off, our way of looking at life is not really correct. We keep on making mistakes because we are pulled on one side by the temptations of life and on the other by our own conscience. Then we start learning and make sadhana the most important factor. Swami Satyananda used to say, “When you are in doubt do sadhana, when you are depressed do sadhana, when you are worried do sadhana. For anything that you want to overcome, do sadhana.” I have followed this in my life, and in thirty-five years of teaching I have found that sadhana can overcome anything and everything one wants.

If the sannyasa tradition did not exist, or the yoga culture was not there, what would our condition be? Who would give us spiritual knowledge? Who would lead us to the path of truth? It is very difficult to know the path of truth, particularly in Kali Yuga, the current age. That is

why without yoga, we cannot function. The sannyasins and the yoga culture cannot function without our support for the simple reason that if we appreciate them we will visit from time to time. The sannyasins who lead us to the right path and the creation of the ashram is part of everyone's contribution towards life. This is how the ashram has come about.

The contribution of my Guruji has been absolutely tremendous. I have seen it grow from a small ashram. It started with one big hall with Swamiji's room next to it. Everywhere there were temporary shelters with corrugated sheets as roofs. Swami Satyananda's techniques were very different and Swami Niranjan's techniques are also very different, because this is how great masters are made. Yoga and life must be complementary. You cannot advance without honesty, truthfulness, kindness, generosity and charity. Where does it come from? It cannot be taught by ordinary people. It can only be taught by great masters.

—Sri Dadi Bilimoria, Mumbai

My meeting with Paramahamsaji

About fifteen years ago, when I was in my late teens, and in college, I read the *Teachings of Swami Satyananda* with great interest. Little did I know then that my mother intentionally left those six volumes within arm's reach for my sister and myself. I had the opportunity to speak with him only once soon after, when, very reluctantly, on the insistence of my grandmother, I accompanied my mother to Rikhia. That meeting became a most awesome experience – one that only Paramahamsaji could make possible. This was during the period of his panchagni sadhana, when he wore only a langot. My first impression was one of fascination, as I observed his striking, flowing beard and piercing eyes. We were a small group attending a satsang outside Ganesh Kutir, where he sat on a simple charpai. Swami Niranjan did the honours of introducing us one by one. As he nodded to

each of us in turn, it suddenly felt like we became completely transparent to him. When my turn came, I was taken aback by his questions regarding computers and his genuine interest in them.

At the time I was just starting off on my present career (with software) and things were not going well. I was in a dilemma with one client in particular who was breathing down my neck over a problem in software development. I had become despondent. The first words Paramhamsaji said were, “It is important to remember that other people’s problems are not your problems, but their own.” Those words were like an awakening! Instantly I knew they were meant for me. The enormous weight on my back melted away and I became devoid of worry, completely quiet! I had an experience of truthful joy in his name: Satya – Ananda!

Thereafter, I listened in rapt attention, spellbound by his personality and knowledge on all issues. The satsang was to be an hour long and we had tickets back to Kolkata for a train at noon. I glanced at my watch, “Will Swamiji remember to stop?” He was like clockwork – no sooner was it ten o’clock, he said “Ok, now you must go.” The experience I had on that day is not comprehensible – for me the words he spoke were not words but a mandate. I would have done anything that Paramahamsaji had said at that point. That was the power that I will forever remember as only Paramahamsaji’s!

—*Dhruv Majumdar, Kolkata*

The making of a karma sannyasin

I still remember that 1963 autumn evening, I had the opportunity to have darshan of Guruji, Paramahansa Swami Satyanandaji, in the European (English) Club in Muzaffarpur where we had gathered to listen to his first discourse in Muzaffarpur. I was under twenty, an engineering student who was enjoying Durga Pooja vacation. My father was a member of the said club whom I had accompanied that evening.

I have no memories of teachings that were given that evening except that Ma Yoga Shakti who was the first disciple of Swamiji started coming to our residence and conducted asana classes at our place in Kalambagh Road. Kirtan of *Siddha Prathana* were also organized every Sunday, regularly with little irregularities.

However, the impression, of the First International Yoga Convention held under the patronage of Paramahamsaji himself at BSY at the Goenka Dharmashala, Munger, in October 1964, was never erasable. I had gone there with my father because I was again home for Durga Pooja vacation in Muzaffarpur. This was perhaps destined. Those four days of regular eye contact from morning 3.45 am till late in the evening, I cannot find words to describe what was happening to me and transforming me. I was perhaps fully mesmerized by 'the personality and the person'. During those four days only, I had seen another Paramahamsaji in the making, Paramahamsaji Swami Niranjanananda who was also there with his parents. Swamiji himself on the harmonium, and sometimes with Amar Sangeet, used to chant his favourite bhajans and kirtans.

Another year passed, my father was transferred from Muzaffarpur to Patna. In October 1965, again during my Durga Pooja vacation my father took me to BSY, but this time we went to take a yoga course of seven to ten days duration. During our stay in the ashram premises, lessons in asana, pranayama, antar mouna, tratak, ajapa japa, chidakash dharana, nada yoga and yoga nidra were deliberated by Sri Paramguru Paramahamsaji himself. I consider myself to be one of the luckiest and privileged who had had inductions from yug purush, jnan yogi, siddha purusha and *trikalgyata*, a knower of past, present and future – all in one.

On the last day of the classes, the abhyasis were asked to do shankhaprakshalana, kunjla and neti. Shankhaprakshalana abhyas started in the morning. Most of the people started running for toilets after taking only four to six glasses of lukewarm saline water and could complete it by taking twelve

to sixteen glasses of water, but I did not feel pressure even after gulping initially about twelve glasses of water, though my stomach felt tense and tight. Swamiji instructed me to take two more glasses of water after which I started vomiting all over the place. The colourful vomit made a picturesque painting on the canvas, but I was looking pathetic and holding my head nervously. Swamiji just touched my head and said, "It is OK." Kunjal had taken place and neti was carried out. I had thrown all the toxins out in kunjal and I was relieved forever of a chronic skin disease of four to five years standing which allopaths, homeopaths and ayurvedacharyas could not cure. The yoga nidra and other practices helped me do much better in my scores in engineering exams.

After passing my engineering exams in May 1966, my father took me with my younger brothers to BSY as four of us were to be initiated in *yajnopaveet*, holy thread ceremony, in the ashram in the presence of Sri Swamiji. After *yajnopaveet* we were then and there initiated into mantra diksha by Paramahamsaji.

Thereafter I had short personal contacts with him. Once was in 1967 at Patna College where he was invited to deliberate to the students of Patna University. In 1974 in Bokaro Ram Mandir, where I walked with my wife to have darshan of the deity, but to my surprise, I heard Guruji's voice on the loudspeaker. We quickly and most delightfully entered the gate of the mandir, to see him seated on the asan deliberating a small gathering, in the old Yajnashala of the mandir. We had a small chat and he too was surprised to find us in Bokaro. I told him that I had joined Bokaro Steel Plant in 1971. In 1975 I went with my wife to attend a yoga convention in Dhanbad.

In the meantime in 1973, my father retired from Government Service. He was a regular visitor of BSY and he would apprise us of all activities and his interactions with Sri Swamiji. He even sought, once in 1971 and again in 1973, Guru's permission for himself to be initiated into

full sannyasa which Swamiji declined saying he had yet to complete his liabilities of educating the other four sons and a daughter and setting them up in life. It was with Guruji's blessings and moral support that he completed it all successfully. Most important was my younger sister's marriage, which could be solemnized by 'His blessing'. According to Guruji, "The groom will show up at your house" was true verbatim.

In October 1982, my father left his earthly body and our contacts with Sri Swamiji were rare. This was perhaps our testing time, but Guruji never allowed to let us go.

In early 1988, I was passing through difficult times in service life. I wrote to Guruji that after the demise of my father, he had forgotten me. The reply came quickly, "Neither I have forgotten you nor you have forgotten me, the ashram doors are always open to you – Satyam." I immediately wrote back that I would attend the Nada Yoga course. During all the sessions of the course I had darshan of Guruji and heard him on *Saundarya Lahari*, *Gita*, *Ramacharitmanas*.

On Guru Poornima in 1988, a notice was given that those who wanted to be initiated into karma sannyasa, should give their names to the office in the evening and get two geru dhotis and a rudraksha mala. I registered my name. We were told to report at 3.30 am next morning in the office for diksha. We were taken in the morning to the sixth floor in Ganga Darshan for diksha. Guruji gave diksha to all participants one by one, but my name was not announced. Guruji enquired if I was sure and ready to get karma sannyasa diksha. I nodded in affirmation. He asked Satsangiji to fill again a form for me. This way I was initiated as Guruprasadanand in the morning of Guru Poornima in 1988. I was instructed to do regular mantra jap and chant Chapter 5 Gita Patha or read the book *Karma Sannyasa* by Sri Swamiji.

The meaning of life as a karma sannyasi was not clear to me, but since then it is becoming clear day by day in going through the book on *Karma Sannyasa* from time to time.

The spiritual name as given by the Guru, is what the aspirant should strive to achieve. I have been getting from time to time certain books which he must have deemed right for that time. I had from him *Sadhana* (letters from Vishwaprem), *Guru Disciple Relationship*, *Ajapa-japa and Chidakash Dharana* and *Four Steps to Samadhi*.

In 1990, I received a letter from Munger that Sri Swamiji was doing panchagni sadhana in Rikhia (his tapobhoomi). If I wished, I could have his darshan on the date announced. We had his darshan at Rikhia. Since that day, I with my wife and three daughters have been regular visitors to Rikhia. On 23 December 1992, Sunday morning, I visited Rikhia with wife and daughters. Guruji sat on a chatai in front of his tent and a chatai was spread for visitors too. We talked one-to-one as there was not other visitor for about 2 hours.

I have attended most of the Sat Chandi Mahayajnas (Sita Kalyanam) year after year. Since the last four to five years, I have been feeling throughout the yajnas that he is doing Maha Rasa like Lord Krishna, who delivered *rasa ananda*, bliss, to us gopes and gopis and enjoyed accepting love, *prem*, from us. We, gopes and gopis attended Maha Rasa year after year. Once the Maha Rasa was completed we would eagerly wait for the next one of the next year. Many others may have enjoyed different feelings about Him.

To me, he was Lord Shankar, he would donate anything and everything that a bhakta or disciple demanded or needed of him. He had us around him, like Lord Shankar has, as garlands of different types of the most dangerous venomous snakes around his neck.

He is Brahma too. One who created or carved two diamonds: Swami Niranjanananda and Swami Satyasangananda and many more gems. He has given us new avenues and has been our mentor. Looking back, I find life would have been meaningless without him. When the process of making or moulding starts, only Guru can know when the creation shall be completed, but he cannot tell us.

I wish and pray the Guru who is now omnipresent, that He gives us strength to strive to become truly what he had thought us to be, his true disciple. This shall be a true tribute to the Paramguru.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

—*Sannyasi Guruprasadananda, Bokaro (Jharkhand)*

Magic of Sita's wedding

In November-December 1996, the month of Marga Shirsha, a one-month *Ram Nam Aradhana anusthana* (worship through the chanting or singing of the name Sri Rama) was held in Rikhia. It was scheduled to begin on 26th November. However, I planned to attend for the last week and arrive on 19th December.

Before my arrival, the media was full of reports of a fierce cyclone in the Bay of Bengal. The Indian Meteorology Department forecast that this cyclone could prove devastating, particularly for coastal Andhra Pradesh and ensured that the area was cleared. Consequently thousands of people and cattle had to move out of their dwellings.

After a few days, reports came that the aggression of the storm had suddenly diminished and the cyclone had been submerged within the sea.

Although the news was received with a sigh of relief, questions arose about the efficacy of the weather forecasts. Scientists quoted scientific data to prove the accuracy of the impending cyclone, but had no explanation for its sudden submerging into the sea.

When I reached Rikhia my mind was full of information and questions, but on 21st December I was surprised to hear Sri Swamiji describe how the episode unfolded. He said, "We started this aradhana on 26th November and soon after news reached us that a powerful storm was moving rapidly towards us from Andhra Pradesh. This was not an ordinary storm, but one of the most devastating and fiercest cyclones of the century. Where we are situated in the north, even an ordinary

storm uproots and fells trees to the ground. So if the cyclone reached us it would have reduced all the arrangements to dust. I know man has no control over such a fury of Nature, but I thought of another plan.

“The 15th December is Shukla Panchami of Marga Shirsha, the day when Sita’s wedding took place. So I decided to celebrate Sita’s wedding as part of this aradhana and at once the weather forecast began to improve. The preparations for celebrating this auspicious occasion immediately began. The image of Sri Sita was brought from Jaipur. She was to arrive on the 15th, but I insisted that she be here on the 12th.

“Sita is shakti incarnate and the cyclone is a form of shakti, so how could Sita allow any disturbance at her own wedding? According to her wish, the storm changed its route and the wedding took place. Had it come, everything would have collapsed. I had to arrange Sita’s wedding just to prevent the storm invading from the south and it worked. It did the trick and we were all spared the fury of Mother Nature.”

Here, in the remote rural village of Rikhia, was revealed the puzzle of the cyclone submerging into the sea which meteorologists around the world could not explain.

Seemingly ordinary in his physical frame, this sage, vested with immeasurable powers, tamed the fierce cyclone through a resolve. What we know of him or claim to understand is, at best, a very insignificant part of him. He is far too great for us to comprehend any aspect fully.

I have heard and read that an aspirant has to resort to austerities, *tapasya*, to acquire shakti. Sri Swamiji undertook panchagni sadhana, a very difficult and onerous *tapasya*, for nine years. I have also read that one who completes panchagni acquires control over nature and becomes controller of the five elements. This supernatural occurrence is an example of the outcome of a *tapasvi*’s resolve. Sri Swamiji attributes all this to Sita’s wedding ceremony, but the fact remains that the very idea of celebrating Sita’s marriage

arose in Sri Swamiji's mind only and was solemnized due to his will alone.

Our master and inspiration, Swami Satyananda, is full of unimaginable, infinite divine powers. We are privileged to have been in the company of such a yuga purusha.

All this is God's lila. The question we can contemplate is, 'who does God especially choose to channel His shakti – when, where and how?' It is said, 'Being won by the intense love of a devotee, God is seen changing His rules – *prabal prem ke pale pad kar, prabhu ko niyam badalte dekha*'.

—Swami Atmabhishek Saraswati, Noida, UP

Philosopher's stone

Tulsidas says in the *Ramcharitamanas*: *Karama cahai raghupati guna gaha, laghu mati mori charita avagaha* – "I want to recount the virtues of the Lord of Raghus, Sri Rama, but my intellect is poor; whereas the exploits, character or story of Rama is unfathomable, immeasurable or unlimited." Similarly, Sri Swamiji was the ocean of virtues. Therefore, to write anything about him, for a person like me with little intellect, is really very difficult.

Sri Swamiji possessed deep knowledge of most subjects and could speak fluently, non-stop on anything. Whenever and whatever he spoke, it seemed as if he was answering the questions and problems haunting the minds of all the members of his audience. Once you were sitting in front of him, you never wanted to leave, however important the work you had to attend to.

Sri Swamiji laid great emphasis on the growth and development of children, being the citizens of the India of tomorrow. The Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, Munger, and the kanya and batuk movement of Rikhiapeth are great examples in this connection. Today, they are learning the English language and computers on the one hand and yoga, stotra chanting, havan, abhisheka and bhajan-kirtan on the other. You cannot find this type of samskara-building

movement anywhere else in the world. Sri Swamiji told us a strong foundation is the most important aspect of a building. Children with good samskaras will constitute the foundation of a healthy society. All his teachings are in keeping with both the present and future needs of society.

Ganga Darshan Yogashram and Rikhiapeeth, the two main institutions established by Swami Satyananda, are well known throughout the world. Whoever comes and lives here, a sannyasin, student or guest, receives the spiritual energy pervading the environment. One receives the necessary direction to properly discipline and manage oneself so that one can experience happiness and harmony in life.

Swami Satyananda propagated, with great conviction and force, the teachings of 'serve, love, give', as propounded by his guru, Swami Sivananda. The variety of activities continuously going on at Ganga Darshan and Rikhiapeeth are living examples of the operational dimensions of these teachings. Only a saint like him can achieve this, it is beyond the capacity of any other person, whatever their power, position or wealth.

His personality was like the philosopher's stone; whoever came in contact with him had the direction of their life thoroughly changed. While describing the virtues of a saint, Tulsidas says in the *Ramacharitamanas*: '*Bichurata eka prana hari lehi* – a saint causes mortal pain while parting, meaning his separation is as painful as death'. Today Sri Swamiji is not among us and no doubt this is painful to some extent, but his purifying and holy presence will always be experienced at Ganga Darshan and Rikhiapeeth. Moreover, his directions and blessings will also be ever available there.

Garuda says to Kaka Bhusundi in the *Ramacharitamanas*: '*Jivana janma suphala mama bhayau, tava prasada samsaya saba gayau* – my life and birth into this world have both been rewarded, and by your grace all my doubts have been removed'. On account of Sri Swamiji's blessings, I feel that my life has become useful and meaningful. His darshan and satsang changed the course of my life. Please continue

to shower your grace Sri Swamiji. With prostrations at your lotus feet.

—*Sannyasi Shraddhamati, Munger*

In gratefulness

I met Swami Satyananda on 14th May 1979 in Australia where I received mantra diksha and spiritual name from him. That visit is still a vivid memory. I entered the room where Sri Swamiji was seated, to the right a fireplace was blazing. I sat in front of him and my mind went blank; all the questions I had, all the rational thinking, the sense of time, was gone. There was just him. Sri Swamiji patiently waited till I found my mala and remembered what I had to ask him. I left with the knowledge in my heart that I had found all I was looking for: a guru and a purpose in life.

That brought me to Munger and the Bihar School of Yoga, where I could see Sri Swamiji every day and come in closer contact with his mission: to bring yoga into the life of everyone, with comprehensible scientific explanations and easy access, applicable in many areas of society.

When leaving Munger in 1980, Sri Swamiji told me, “I’m coming to Italy this year. I will see you there.” When Swamiji did arrive in Italy, I found the courage to ask him for a sadhana. He looked at me with a smile and said, “First you work very hard then think about a sadhana.”

In those years Sri Swamiji came to Europe and Italy several times. On one occasion when Swamiji was due to come, for some strange reason I had decided to fast till he arrived. Somebody informed him about it and, when we met in his hotel room some disciples had brought a suitcase full of Indian food. Sri Swamiji had the suitcase opened and began to distribute food to all. When my turn came he kept dishing out large amounts and said, “Ananda, eat it all then I’ll give you more.” I ate to the point I was nearly exploding. When lunch was over another person arrived and Sri Swamiji enquired if he had lunch. He had not, so Sri Swamiji said,

“Ananda, take him to a good restaurant for lunch.” Then to the guest he said, “Make him eat whatever you eat.” And I did, resolving never to fast on such occasions!

On another instance I was thinking about renouncing coffee which I liked very much and switch over to tea. Sri Swamiji was meeting some guests and I was seated in a corner. He was talking in Hindi and suddenly he turned to me and said, “Ananda, tea or coffee is the same.” And then he continued to speak in Hindi. I was amazed, he knew exactly what was on my mind and with that sentence he made me realize the limitation of my mind and the vastness of his awareness.

I am grateful to God to have had the opportunity in my life to see the development and growth of Swami Satyananda’s mission from the original smaller ashram to Ganga Darshan, an oasis of beauty and perfection dedicated to yoga and spiritual life.

I am grateful to have been a witness of Sri Swamiji’s detachment when he left Munger and passed Ganga Darshan on to Swami Niranjan. I am grateful to have seen the steady and gradual development of the ashram at Rikhia, to have seen what Sri Swamiji did and is still doing for the villagers and, most of all, for the children, the kanyas and batuks. He had everything planned in advance, for he had the capacity to have a vision of the future. One of his sentences that has always inspired me is, “The sun always rises at the horizon.” Each time I left Munger or Rikhia it was always with a new boost of inspiration, enthusiasm and optimism, and the heart full and light.

I am grateful to the higher forces to have met a living example of a sannyasin totally dedicated to his guru, his mission and to the upliftment of humanity. I am grateful to have learned and understood yoga from Swami Satyananda, through his books and satsangs which are an immense treasure for humanity.

The vastness of his knowledge, brought to us in a practical, systematic and scientific way, is a source of

encouragement and inspiration, acting as a flame of light giving us direction in life.

There are no appropriate words to describe my feelings for Sri Swamiji. All I can say is that the feeling is unique as he was a unique being, a unique man, sannyasin, teacher, explorer of life and spirit, a unique guru. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you Sri Swamiji.

—*Swami Anandananda Saraswati, Italy*

A complete being

Swami Satyananda moulded me with his presence, his inspiration and his endless wisdom. After being with him I believed that Saint Francis of Assisi had existed, and that it is possible to attain expanded dimensions in our lives. Sri Swamiji was a complete being. My perception always told me that he was the same as God, moving in a little human body on this planet. He touched me so deeply, that not only did he play the role of my guru, but he was also my father, my mother, my best friend and my greatest source of inspiration. He was a very down-to-earth and practical person, but at the same time he was living in the highest states of consciousness.

I have many experiences with Swami Satyananda and these few words will not be enough to contain them all. I will share some of these powerful moments that have shaped my life. While working with him he would give me many hints about the direction of my life. Each time I made a mistake he would call me and then advise me with so much love and compassion. In that way he taught me about how not to judge others, about shortcuts, humility, selflessness and so many other aspects of life. He also taught me a lot about concentration and awareness.

Once I worked with him to make a fence with bamboo poles. He stood in front of me holding each pole with his hands and ordered me to hit it at the top with a huge hammer. I was afraid, as his hands were right there, but he

insisted that I go ahead and told me to look carefully. My whole body became electric with fear. We went on with this karma yoga for some hours. This experience took away a great deal of my lack of concentration and helped me later on in life.

I feel that Sri Swamiji gave me the capacity to gradually understand him more as the Spirit, rather than a limited human being.

I cannot believe that such big part of my life was in his company. On another occasion, as he spent hours teaching me how to organize a kitchen store, he spoke of his final departure. He said, "I will choose the date, a place somewhere here in Rikhia and the method, and I will do it for the glory of all of you. I will sit cross-legged and I will drop this body at will, in the same way you drop your dhotis after using them." And this is exactly what he did, choosing to depart as a Mahayogi.

The most remarkable and important thing in my life was to meet Paramhansa Satyananda in the early seventies in my native Colombia. He told me to come to India, where I lived in his transformative presence. From 1980 to 1996 my little life was exposed to his oceanic presence as he enriched my heart with his unlimited wisdom and inspiration. Swami Satyananda was the perfect sannyasin, yogi, friend, organizer, builder, cook, teacher, everything. He was the Divine in human form. He told us that spirituality is not to be found in the clouds, but by participating in human life with full awareness. He used to say that the best yoga posture was not a headstand, but a feet stand.

Swamiji brought a new dimension of existence to the world that will remain as the perfect and most effective way for human evolution and expansion. Whoever he met, even once, was touched forever by his presence.

Now the Lion has left a physical frame and we can hear his roaring from all corners of the universe.

His body is the whole cosmos and his glory covers all those who came across him. If we meditate and repeat the

mantra we will become more receptive to his subtle presence. In Rikhia, he is still very much alive, playing and singing through the kanyas and batuks: he is dancing with the wind and shining through the sun: he is showing his beauty through the flowers in the rock garden and he shows himself as the fragrance released from the Tulsi plants.

Paramahamsaji is more alive than before. I am able to feel him in my heart especially when I close my eyes. He promised this to me in the year 1996 a few months before I left the ashram. He came in front of me and, touching the centre of my chest with his right hand index finger, and told me, “This little body that you see in front of you is not me. If you really want to see the real me go to your heart, you will find me there.”

Yes, his body is resting now and sitting in padmasana under the floor of Parna Kutir, the little room where he did his first anushthana in Rikhia, but his spirit is resting in the depth of our hearts.

—*Swami Muktidharma Saraswati, New Zealand*

Through the lens

Words seem useless when trying to describe someone of such unimaginable magnitude as Sri Swami Satyananda.

In recent years, I have been honoured to have the opportunity to photograph Sri Swamiji. As I followed him with the camera, I learned so much from his actions. He always seemed to be several steps ahead of everyone else. Many times, when I thought I had Sri Swamiji in the camera lens, he would quickly change course and one time he jumped the fence! I watched the way he managed people, how he was father to the kanyas and batuks, cared for his neighbours, the way he showed up early for everything. I saw the way he would change plans at the last moment to always keep everyone on their toes. I witnessed him describe his vision of the new university at Rikhia while on a tour of all the properties. To my amazement, the next year it was being

built. I saw how he cared for every detail, from the tiles in the new buildings to the grand vision of a Kanya Kitchen. Through that little lens, I tasted a minute fraction of this great man's immensity and this has been enough to impress me forever.

I saw so many expressions emanate from his hands, his face, through the changes in his voice just before he would expand, larger than life into a serious moment or into laughter that shook the building.

Sri Swamiji could be anything at any one moment: an expression of a child or the lover of the Cosmic Mother; an elder wise man, then a politician, a warrior, a historian or an astrologer; next, mimicking the animals around Rikhia to prove a point, followed by a father stern and then soft; and always the humble disciple as he described his guru Sri Swami Sivananda with so much love. He would answer all our questions, even before we could ask them and each time I left Rikhia more full than I could imagine was possible.

Swami Satyananda led by example and served all in need. In the West, he gave us practices, books and the inspiration to live a more balanced, healthy life using scientific tools for the intellectual mind. In Rikhia, he provided access to education, medical care and housing. All, especially children, widows and pensioners received not only the necessities, but also pride and confidence. If we can follow even one of his deeds or teachings, we will also contribute to the world being a better place.

While I miss Sri Swamiji's physical presence and long to see his face full of expression and the words of profound truth on his lips, my deepest self knows that he is within and around us, and will live on forever. May we all work towards sharing his ideals and serve our fellow beings with head, heart and hands.

—*Swami Karmakaruna Saraswati, New Zealand*

A blessing in my life

Sri Swamiji was and is an inspiration and guiding light to all of us. His life is an example of service to humanity. He gave us an opportunity to make a commitment to our spiritual growth and gave us a myriad of practices to help and guide us on our journeys. Sri Swamiji showed us the fullness of yoga and the chance to spread his amazing teachings around the globe to help enrich the life of all who come into contact with them. We are very fortunate to have Sri Swamiji as our guru. Through his books, satsangs and our memories, he and the teachings live on.

To pay tribute to such a great man and guru as Swami Satyananda Saraswati is a daunting request as everything one thinks to say sounds and feels inadequate to express his greatness. Swamiji was and is an inspiration and guiding light to all of us. His life is an example of service to humanity. He gave us an opportunity to make a commitment to our spiritual growth and gave us a myriad of practices to help and guide us on our journeys.

When I was a small child I used to think that someone was always watching over me. On a particular street I used to imagine that someone would stop their car and taken me on a different journey. When I met Swamiji in London in 1983 I realized that the someone was him. At that first meeting he answered all my unasked questions and I found myself in a queue for a private interview (not quite sure why). He gave me a mantra and from that moment on everything in my life changed. I was no longer in control and began that different journey.

In 1985, I took initiation into poorna sannyasa and at that time I had a dream. I dreamt that Swamiji was lying on the floor and I was sitting at his head, holding his head in my hands and like this he died. Some years later in a satsang I asked Swami Niranjan about this dream. He said that it was a very beautiful dream for it meant that Swamiji had been my guru in a previous life. I hope we meet again.

In 1986, Swamiji told me, “Your spiritual path is to teach yoga,” and with that familiar wave of his hand continued with, “apart from that I do not mind what you do.” I feel privileged to have been given such a gift and such a clear path.

Over the years, and many blessings later, we have seen the changing faces of Swamiji and different facets of his life. There are many stories and special moments with Swamiji to relate and at times I squirm with embarrassment, at my lack of humility in the presence of one so great, when I remember some of them. He showed me my weaknesses, gave me strengths, taught me to trust and showed me kindness and his life displayed what the important things in life are.

On 6th December 2009, I noticed I had a missed call on my mobile from 1.30 in the morning. I went outside to get a signal and a text came in bearing the news of Swamiji’s Mahasamadhi. Before I had finished reading it I felt his energy flood into the valley and surround me with love and light. I felt blessed and filled with a tremendous sense of gratitude for all that he has given me.

Every time he comes into my mind I feel an inner warmth and I smile. Swamiji lives on in our hearts and minds forever.

—*Swami Vedantananda Saraswati, Portugal*

Lesson in giving

Spiritual lessons can never be taught through the intellect or a book because they require the magic of the guru, taking the opportune moment to probe and awaken the inner conscience of the disciple.

In the early days of BSY, life was very simple. The opportunities to satisfy one’s latent desires were very few. Once someone sent me a king-size block of chocolate, hand-delivered by a visitor from Australia. Of course I wanted to eat it all by myself and decided to hide it carefully. At that time I slept near the kitchen. Within an hour came the

instruction that Sri Swamiji wanted me to move my bedding to the stairwell. Not only was his room adjacent to the stairwell, but most sannyasins had to pass the stairwell to get to their rooms.

That day I was especially vigilant with my duties and worked late until everyone had retired. I walked barefoot past Sri Swamiji's door and immediately he called out, "Kaun hai" (Who's there). Not everyone spoke Hindi so he called out again in English. I replied and he called me into the room. Sri Swamiji was reclining on a large couch propped up by cushions and waved me to come closer. As I approached, he turned to the side that was hidden from my view and picked up a bar of chocolate that was opened and broken into several pieces. "Would you like some chocolate?" he asked, looking into my eyes with all the sweetness and innocence of a child. I stood there with my own bar of chocolate hidden in my dhoti and took one piece from him, feeling very guilty. "Take it all," he said.

That evening I sat on my bed with both chocolates and deliberated on what to do. Did he know or was it just a coincidence? The thought emerged that I should share with everyone, so the following morning I sat outside with the chocolate broken up in small pieces to hand out. Just before the other swamis arrived, Swamiji came out and sat beside me. "Let's do it together," he said. "Giving is so much fun." And he took each piece from my hand and placed it in the mouth of each sannyasin as they came past.

The inner experiences are always more subtle and known only to guru and disciple yet they become the most powerful and memorable.

—*Swami Yogasagar Saraswati, South Africa*

The holy wonderman in the holy wonderland of Rikhia

So many memories of Sri Swamiji are floating before my chidakasha, and I am saying to myself, "Release the memories. Write them down. Do not try hard to make them

something special, let them come as they are.” So, this is my chidakasha dharana with Sri Swami Satyananda.

In 1993, I came to Rikhia for the first time with my husband, Swami Omkarmurti, after Sri Swamiji ended his panchagni sadhana. At that time Rikhia was a very small village and it was not easy to reach it. The ashram was also very small. When we entered the tapobhoomi, Sri Swamiji was sitting on the ground on a small asana giving darshan. I looked at him and our eyes met. I had a profound sensation of prem and respect. He looked like an unusual being, as if he was in a different dimension than us. His skin was almost burnt from the sadhana, he had long white hair and a flowing beard. His eyes were special, so clear and piercing; they pierced right through my soul. Then he started to give satsang. For two hours he told us about his sadhana and many other things. When he finished, he asked us to leave immediately or he would release Bholenath!

What did I receive from that satsang? He told us about the time of autumn in India. Even now I can hear his voice saying, “Feel the vayu, you can feel how clear, thin and cool it is. Smell the vayu, there is a beautiful smell of vayu in the autumn of Rikhia.” I tried, and for the first time I experienced autumn in that way. From then on, each year when I go to Rikhia I feel and smell the autumn vayu. It is truly special, unlike anywhere else.

The Rikhia autumn was the first holly wonder which I received from Sri Swamiji. Many more followed, and Rikhia became a wonderland for me and Sri Swamiji the beautiful, holly wonderman.

Each year I returned to Rikhia, my only home in India. I had not been very fond of India in the past, but Sri Swamiji made me love it. As his magic began to work through me and I rediscovered my own homeland, I began to love all the people in the street whom I would always avoid before. Now I understood them, I began to have compassion for them.

One year during the chanting of *Ramacharitamanas*, Sri Swamiji suddenly said to Swami Niranjan, “Give the book

to Vishwashakti.” Swamiji said, “She does not read the language.” Sri Swamiji said, “Just give her the book and she will read.” Swamiji gave the book. I looked at it and wondered what to do with it. I had forgotten my language. I opened it, looked at the page and slowly began to recognize the words. I was reading the book! I could follow the chanting. I looked at Sri Swamiji and he was smiling. From that moment, I have been able to read my language (not as fast as the pandits!) and even speak it. If this is not a wonder, then what is?

The year 1995 was when Sri Swamiji transmitted his prana and jnana to Swamiji. He showed us his crystal lingam and said, “Through this crystal lingam I can see you all wherever you are. From now on Swami Niranjana will watch over you.” This was a very tender moment. We all had tears in our eyes. That evening he called Swami Omkarmurti and me and said, “Today you will both perform sandhya arati to Devi with Swami Niranjana.” I looked at him in surprise, as I knew it is not customary for a non-Hindu to enter the mandala and perform pooja. Sri Swamiji said, “From my childhood I’ve heard that God is in everybody, so God is also in Omkar. How can we not allow God to enter his own house?” So Omkar and I had the good fortune of performing the arati while Sri Swamiji observed the ceremony. When we came out we were in a trance and Sri Swamiji said to Omkar, “It was my honour that you did it.” It was a divine day for us.

It is said that the guru knows everything about his disciples. I was always afraid of cows. One year during Sat Chandi, Swami Niranjana said to me, “This year you will start the prasada ceremony; you will give a cow to a villager.” I looked at him in great fright. How was I going to do this! For the next few moments, I could not think of anything other than the cow. I had visions of me lying flat on the ground with thousands of people staring at me. I looked at Sri Swamiji, and he was smiling. Gathering courage, I slowly ventured near the cow. Swamiji said, “Wait with the cow till I

tell you to start.” So there I was, standing miserably with my cow and thinking I would not be able to fulfil the command of my guru, but slowly something started to happen in me. Something started to change. For the first time I looked at the cow and saw what a calm and quiet animal it is. I went very close, looked at its eyes and she looked back at me full of calmness and peace. I touched the cow softly. Sri Swamiji was watching me. I realized that he knew about my phobia and this was an opportunity given to overcome it. So I walked down with my cow in a relaxed and elegant manner and handed it over to the villager, telling him to be nice and kind to it. I looked at Sri Swamiji and felt he was satisfied with me, which made me very happy. This had been another wonder indeed.

When I first came to Rikhia I had many pains, physical and emotional. Immediately after I received Sri Swamiji’s darshan when he raised his hand and sent his blessings, I was cured. The pain in my body and soul disappeared. This was a wonder too. I used to say to my friends, I am going to my guru to receive an energy injection. And it is true. Each darshan of Sri Swamiji was divine and full of love. Each time I received answers to all my questions and returned to Slovenia with a clear vision.

When my mother passed away, I was in Rikhia and Swamiji said to me, “Sri Swamiji is sending you the message that your mother passed away on a very auspicious day, she was a lucky person.” I could not believe it! He knew that my mother had passed away without my ever mentioning it.

One year before our journey to Rikhia I decided that I would buy all the necessary things for pooja in India and start doing pooja regularly. It was the day when sannyasins were receiving prasad during Sat Chandi. Even today I can’t believe this: I received a beautiful pooja set! In surprise I looked at Sri Swamiji. He was laughing and said, “Start doing your pooja regularly.” With tears in my eyes I replied, “Yes, Swamiji, I will do pooja to you.” Later I told this story to Swami Satsangi. She looked at me quizzically and

said, “Sri Swamiji chose that set for you some months ago. ‘Vishwashakti will need it,’ he said.”

I remember the year when Sri Swamiji was standing at the main gate with a pot of water and washing our feet. It was a practical lesson on how to be humble and kind to everybody. Yet another year he presented each of us with a flower garland. We were all feeling very important on receiving them, but immediately after he told us that he gave the garlands so the widows from the village who had prepared them could receive some money. The lesson was, “Don’t think of yourself as important, be humble and simple.”

There are endless stories of divine wonders and practical lessons with Sri Swamiji. We have all been witness to how he changed us through those twelve years of Sat Chandi. We all became simpler, humbler, softer and a little more tender.

Sri Swamiji liked to make us happy and sometimes he played with us. One year he made Swami Omkarmurti wear a Bengali dress and walk around the whole area. As he modelled, we were all laughing and clapping like children. At another time Sri Swamiji received a beautiful flower crown made of rajanigandha flowers. He called me and placed it on my head. Can you imagine my feelings at that moment? I felt like a queen!

Apart from all the personal wonders, the biggest wonder that Sri Swamiji has given to us is Rikhia. Through what he has accomplished there, he has taught us the art of giving, of daan. The way the place has changed and is still changing is incredible. Rikhia is indeed the wonderland of Sri Swamiji.

Sri Swamiji taught us all about yoga and yogic philosophy; we received enormous wisdom and knowledge from him. When we read his books, we should read them very carefully as there is so much hidden knowledge underlying every sentence, but the best wisdom which we have received from him is, “Be good, do good and help those who need your help.”

—*Swami Vishwashakti Saraswati, Slovenia*

In memory of an eminent teacher

I met Swami Satyananda in 1968 in Copenhagen, and went straight to India to live with him in what at the time was a small and intimate ashram: BSY (Bihar School of Yoga) or Sivananda Ashram in Munger, Bihar. After my return to Scandinavia in 1970, Swami Satyananda kept visiting our school almost every year for twelve years, the last time being in 1982, when we had programs with him in Denmark and Sweden. In the 1990s I often taught in Australia and also in the present-day school in Munger so, on my trips there, I would stop over and visit him in Rikhia. Need I say that my stay at his ashram, his personal training, and every succeeding meeting with him was enlightening?

One of the early years when Sri Swamiji visited our school in Copenhagen, he gave me an unexpected advice. We had just finished our meal, when he suddenly said, “Janakananda, you have to be much more aggressive.” I presume that he had spotted me sitting and walking around with a priestly smile on my lips about to lose myself in pretentious ideals. The well-bred Danish young man that I wore on the surface reacted, and I answered, “Swamiji, you don’t mean that!” But the deeper me eventually listened and followed his advice. As a teacher in the seventies I became known for just that: I was strict and consistent, but I would also react to any aggression from students. It was needed then. We had just come out of the sixties with its uproar against authority, and introducing something new into the Nordic culture required a little extra push. I got plenty of students.

Once before, while I was still living in India, Sri Swamiji had said to me, “When you react, react as strongly as you can.” He may also have wanted me to get the message across, but he certainly intended me to exhaust any anger I might have carried within me. He was a tantric teacher, helping me to face that which I feared and avoided. Otherwise he would usually teach in an indirect way, letting the situation mirror when you lost yourself, for you to realize it. Rarely would he give direct criticism.

One of the great gifts Sri Swamiji gave some of us who were with him in 1969, was a three-month tour around India, giving lectures and teaching yoga. We were eight swamis altogether, including him.

To my great surprise, I found myself teaching yoga to people in India: to steelworkers in Jamshedpur, autoworkers in Tatanagar, policemen in Bhopal, railway people at a railway town in Orissa, and enjoying the Holi holiday in the middle of a coal mine near Dhanbad.

We spent around three days in each town, before going on to the next. The first evening Sri Swamiji would give a lecture to a large crowd and some of us had to sit up there with him, or in front of him, in a proper meditation pose. "You must sit still and make a good impression on the audience." To sit motionless during your own meditation may be possible, but in front of a big crowd, with him behind you, during a whole evening speech, was some training.

The next day he would see people all day, and diagnose any problems they had, and then we got the task of teaching them the precise methods that they needed. During this journey it began to make sense to me that it would be worthwhile teaching yoga.

Maybe so many different people have been inspired by Swami Satyananda because he has had distinctly different periods in his life, probing into various aspects of the tradition. He himself talked about twenty-year cycles. When I lived with him and received his training in the late sixties, he was in a period when he personally taught advanced methods and very much from the tantric way of looking at life. He said that he taught tantra even in later years, and maybe he did, but that was another aspect of tantra than when I lived with him and received the full kriya yoga system of twenty-two kriyas and chidakash dharana, as well as principles upon which I could build my sadhana and teaching. I came to live with him at a time when I needed what he was giving. I know that people who have been visiting him later saw things in a different way. We may not

have been interested in the same rituals, but we all learned from him and were inspired by him – and that I think is great.

The yoga and meditation I learned at the time in Sri Swamiji's ashram in India are the methods that I was also inspired to teach – and still teach, now forty years later. I find that people who come to our retreats to meditate seek a yoga that gives them an altered state of consciousness, more energy and inspiration, and of course health – all prerequisites for self-realization.

One of the many yoga methods that Swami Satyananda recovered from ancient texts and also from a secret knowledge passed on from person to person, is the deep-relaxation yoga nidra. This meditative relaxation can provide us with an effective regular practice.

Scientific evidence, recently published, shows that regularity over a long period of your life, when you return every day to a relaxed state – no matter how you live or how stressed you otherwise are – prolongs life and gives a good fundament for health.

“The spiritual attitude is over and over again to return to the great harmony,” Swami Satyananda once said to me.

Today there are many things taught under the name of yoga, but authentic yoga is, I would say, methods that – apart from giving you energy, reducing stress, and strengthening your health, creativity and concentration – give you a wider and more profound perspective on life. Swami Satyananda showed me and made me realize that such an outlook cannot be based on expectations and dreams, but on the witnessing awareness.

Thank you for the rich heritage that you passed on to us, Sri Swamiji.

—*Swami Janakananda Saraswati, Sweden*

Headlight of our time

I met Swami Satyananda in 1978 and was instantly struck by the force of his personality; a great influence and a radiance that enlightened me deeply. He was able to make everybody aware of their 'law of life', their *swadharma*, so that each one was able to give their best. We discovered this particular swadharma through the name he gave us. Mine was *Jai Mini*, the conqueror of matter. Often I think of that name and try to exemplify and practise it.

Swami Satyananda encouraged us to introduce yoga in education. He believed that yoga was a powerful instrument to awaken young people and to help them grow.

Swami Satyananda was a headlight for our time. He paved the way for the twenty-first century and with incomparable power he brought forth yoga as an authentic science: the science of consciousness. He described the protocols of this knowledge with great precision. In this sense he 'globalized' yoga as evidenced by all the academies he founded on five continents. In short, Swami Satyananda is both a great scientist and an authentic spiritual master.

—*Jacques de Coulon, Switzerland*

Reflections on my time as Swamiji's disciple (so far)

When I first met Swamiji forty years ago the absolutely last thing I was looking for was another man to tell me how to run my life! I was already in love with pawanmuktasana, yoga nidra and the shatkarmas, which were helping me become and ex-asthmatic as well as guiding me towards discovering deeper levels of my mind/heart/psyche. In fact, I was very happy and grateful that yoga had come into my life. And that was it, I thought, until I found myself going to France to meet Swami Satyananda, compelled by some force that had nothing to do with logic, nothing to do with my will, my desire.

However, sitting in front of Swamiji for the first class of the day something happened that changed my life for ever. I never questioned it, never tried to resist it, and never will.

In those early years I do not think that we all realized quite how blessed we were to be in the presence of and under the guidance of such a being. I often wish that I had recorded everything he said too, and paid even more attention to the many lessons which came in various forms. I remember thinking that he had taken over the controls of the car and that I was not “driving” my life at all! This was powerfully and literally illustrated one day, driving Swamiji from Heathrow Airport into London, with Swami Atmananda in the back seat. As we came off the motorway at high speed I braked, but to no avail – nothing happened! Swamiji was sitting innocently beside me, looking out of the window, as I discreetly tried the handbrake, a gear change, even the steering wheel – nothing worked! “What a way to go,” I thought, “with my Guru next to me. Hari Om Tat Sat”, and as we approached an imposing set of traffic lights, the controls of the car magically returned! Later, when I asked Swami Atmananda if she was aware of what was going on, she just smiled enigmatically.

Much to my surprise Swamiji told me that I must teach yoga, and I went to Swami Atmananda’s little ashram in Belfast because Swamiji was going to be there for some time, teaching and guiding a month’s course. After shankaprakshalana on the first day, we were offered sliced white bread and sliced raw onion for our evening meal! We all knew that we shouldn’t be eating that, and when we complained to Swamiji he just said “If you want to be yoga teachers, eat it!” Many of the people I have since trained will remember that phrase, not in the same context, but also with mixed feelings!

As time went by, Swamiji moved me to this house in a south London suburb I had never heard of, had me sacked from “my” model agency and sent people to my door asking for yoga classes. Somehow or another he made me into a yoga teacher, not by sending me to India to study nor by suggesting lengthy Teacher Training courses in Britain, but by a miraculous process known as ‘transmission’. This

miracle continues to this day, and will continue even though Swamiji is no longer in his body. I feel sure that it is only the highest and wisest of beings who have this gift of passing on knowledge to others in this way. Over the years I have met other disciples who, like me, have never been formally trained as yoga teachers but who have become effective transmitters of yogic wisdom. This is one aspect of Guru's Grace, and one for which I give thanks for each every day.

Towards the end of the 1970s I felt drawn to the idea of asking Swamiji for karma sannyasa diksha, having read about it in *Yoga* magazine. It seemed the perfect initiation for someone like me, very involved with my children, my friends, music, politics . . . life, in fact! But when I did pluck up the courage to ask him, he said "What are you talking about, there is no such thing," and walked away from me. Later, in Dublin in 1979 he told me that I was "for the big one" and initiated me into poorna sannyasa, with the instruction to "simplify your personal life." Hmmm. Wise words indeed. Wise, because simplicity is something I could understand, something I could aspire to. This is another example of Swamiji's infinite wisdom, and how he trains each one of us appropriately. There does not seem to be a blueprint of a 'good disciple and swami' – he clearly sees our potential, our path and guides us each, one by one, step by step.

When I eventually went to Munger in 1985 I met young swamis, wise beyond their years, whose yoga practice was gardening, cleaning and construction; others who had never been to a yoga class in their life teaching courses and programs in the Ashram. BSY is known for the excellence of its teaching and teachers, but this did surprise me initially. The gradual unfolding of 'real' yoga before my very eyes is indeed a wonder without limitations it seems.

Re-reading the above paragraphs, I am reminded yet again that it is impossible for a finite little human mind to comprehend the infinite. It is likewise nearly impossible to describe the length, breadth and depth of the guru/disciple relationship, except to other disciples. It is more than any

merely human relationship, which is why, on some level it has been hard, these past weeks, to adjust to his leaving. With the passing of a much loved relative or friend the emotional attachment implicit in that relationship allows one to weep and wail, to ‘miss’ the departed person. Yes, I will miss Swamiji’s physical presence – his eyes, his laughter, his hands – but on another level he is always here, with us, and I can’t possibly miss him.

What I can and must do though, is to carry on trying to fulfil his instructions to me, to continue being a channel for this beautiful, transforming system of yoga he has entrusted us with – in his own words “teach yoga – a lot – and don’t take long holidays.” What a privilege, what a treat to be able to do this.

So, thank you, beloved Swamiji, for your love, guidance and inspiration in this life and for lifetimes to come, not only for me, but for the thousands of people worldwide who have experienced your infinite grace.

—Swami Pragyamurti Saraswati, UK

A tribute to Paramahamsaji

Swamiji died as he had lived his extraordinary life – in style. Ever since his childhood he sought to go beyond all limitations and self-definitions. He was a *sadhu* (a spiritual practitioner) until his last breath and it doesn’t surprise me that he returned Home whilst sitting in *padmasana* (the lotus pose) and doing *japa* (mantra repetition).

He had an enormous impact on my life, as he did on the lives of thousands of others worldwide. Until I met him I was full of ignorance: I had no idea of the higher aims of yoga or that each of us as humans have the innate capacity to realize our fullest potential.

I first met Swamiji in early 1971, in Belfast, when he came to Northern Ireland to conduct a yoga training course and give public lectures. I had already become friends with Swami Niranjan (we played football together) and Swami

Atmananda (who then ran the Yoga Centre and who bossed me around as a mother would a badly behaved child!). Inspired by what Swamiji said and by the people I met in the Yoga Centre, I made plans to go to India to study further with him.

I arrived in Munger in early December 1971. I was immediately involved in all types of work, such as mending toilets, cleaning drains and general repair jobs around the ashram. Having previously given a lot of emphasis on intense, formal yogic training in hatha and kriya yoga, at that time Swamiji was emphasizing karma yoga, which suited me perfectly. After some time, he encouraged me to write, which occupied my mind twenty-four hours a day. He even gave me two rooms, one for my work and the other for sadhana! This was totally unfair as everyone else had to squash up like sardines in a tin can.

Swamiji shocked me into waking up from my sleep, again as he did for many others. Through his living example he showed us that it is possible to live in the world of daily affairs, yet remain in constant inner contact and identification with Consciousness. He was totally fearless and I've seen him confront situations head-on that most of us would run a mile from. Living with him, one was forced to confront complexes, doubts, fears and all kinds of mental blockages. Moreover, our words and deeds had to be in accordance with our mind and emotions; otherwise he blasted you. He was a tantric Guru – a fearsome figure, even though he was small in physical stature – who challenged us to shift out of stereotypical behaviour and habits. Either you moved out of conditioning or you moved on! He catalyzed energy through which one was transported to unexplored territory in one's own being and experience. My years with Swamiji were exhilarating and the most transformative of my life. He opened my eyes to the unseeable and my mind to the unthinkable.

At that time the ashram was located in a most strange place, sandwiched between a railway line (which took people

on their life's business) and a road (which seemed to be mainly used to take people on death's business – to the burning *ghats* besides the Ganges!). So we were constantly reminded of the dichotomy between life and death and how fragile life is. Swamiji gave daily satsangs in his small room and talked on all kinds of pertinent subjects, from modern science to the sacred texts of yoga, tantra and Vedanta. I was fascinated by how he elegantly combined practical considerations with spiritual insight.

Swamiji used to go on regular tours of India, often taking three cars in a convoy. These were exciting times and he would give lectures and satsangs all over – especially in central India where he was particularly well-known at that time. He introduced us to people he had met during his *parivrajaka* (wandering) life, after he left Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh. We met people from all stratas of society from crooks to saints. When we reached a town, programs were quickly organized and Swamiji was thrust into meetings, lectures and giving satsangs. We often drove through the night, which may sound romantic but could also be dangerous. Eastern India in particular was rife with *dacoits* (armed robbers). One night we were passing near Bheem Bhand (the place where Buddha is reputed to have met Angulimala) and we stopped in front of a closed railway crossing. Immediately we were surrounded by about ten armed dacoits. Swamiji merely said, "Take what you want." They riffling (literally!) through the luggage in the boot, and then (and this can only happen in India) they decided to take nothing and instead asked for Swamiji's forgiveness and blessings!

He was unfazed by events and everyone he met. He would meet the governor of say the state of Orissa, and whilst paying due respect and formalities, would be in the same state of mind as if he was talking to a local shopkeeper. No nervousness, no dithering. I have seen him give speeches in front of 10,000 people and be talking as though he was discussing with a close friend in the comfort of his room. Such was his equanimity.

Swamiji was an extraordinary organizer in everything that he undertook, whether the ashram affairs, seminars or whatever. We often joked, though partly seriously, that he should become Prime Minister so that he could tackle the impossible job of governing India. We used to organise three or five-day yoga conventions all over India. I remember well that he used to start packing up everything – books, accounts and so forth – half-way through the proceedings without in any way diminishing the quality of the program.

He gave me a spiritual name: Nishchalananda ('unmoving bliss', an epithet of Shiva; which was a bit strange since I was constantly on the move!) whilst sitting around an initiatory fire at midnight in July 1972. It was a magical, timeless moment.

Then in the mid-eighties, for various reasons, there was a major change. He retired from active life passing on the baton to his able successor Swami Niranjan. He became more reclusive and eventually moved to Rikhia where he started rigorous and mind-blowing sadhana (which has been well documented elsewhere). He also started to dedicate much of his time and energy to rural development: helping thousands of villagers in and around Rikhia. He adopted them – mainly tribal people called Shantalis – like a grandfather and they benefited enormously on all levels by having him and his institution in their midst. He continued this work until his recent death.

Though Swamiji has moved on, a part of his essence ever remains with me. I am not sad at his passing because we all have to move on from this temporary abode on planet Earth. In fact, his essence is the essence of us all, call it Consciousness if you wish. The good work that he started is being ably continued by Swami Niranjanananda and Swami Satsangi, aided by their successors. Swamiji showed me how to have fun and be joyful, even in bizarre situations, and I feel he would have wanted us to celebrate his departure in the same way that he celebrated his life in everything that he did. After all, he returned Home from whence he came,

from whence we all come and to where we will all go. Birth, life and death are merely small glitches in Eternity. Death, in itself, is not really an issue of much importance, because it is inevitable. More important is what lies behind the show that is life and existence and the opportunity that we all have as humans to realize this in our direct experience.

Swamiji was an inspiration and a catalyst for spiritual awakening in countless people worldwide. The world seems somehow emptier without him.

—*Swami Nishchalananda Saraswati, Wales*

Master posture

Although I have only spoken with him directly four times in twenty-five years, Paramahamsaji is undoubtedly the greatest, most influential and inspirational being and force in my life. Just to have had the good fortune of entering into his energy field, has been a transforming act in itself. A tangible shift of one's physical and emotional energy, and state of consciousness or awareness could be perceived immediately at both gross and subtle levels.

The first time I went to the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, was for five days only. It felt like being in a powerful washing machine which turned me upside down and inside out, and shook up and subtly altered everything that I had previously known or thought to be real. The experience of being there was simultaneously both alien and yet disarmingly familiar, as if, after a long absence and a tiring journey, I had finally arrived back home.

I was given an area in the garden to practise karma yoga, and could not help but notice that whenever I moved close to one of the surrounding buildings, water began to flow spontaneously and copiously from my eyes, like a tap with a broken washer. I was not feeling sad, my mind felt quieter than usual and absorbed in the task at hand, yet for two days the taps poured freely without any control on my part. Finally I asked a swami what this building was. "Oh that's the

kutir where Sri Swamiji stays. Why don't you go inside to see him, and ask for a mantra and spiritual name?"

Without having any idea of the enormous life-changing implications involved, I asked for permission to receive his darshan, which was quickly granted, and suddenly I found myself sitting a few feet in front of him. "Yes?" he asked. After requesting a mantra, which he gave me, I enquired about a health issue, to which he replied, "Simple, just sit in siddha yoni asana for ten minutes every day." I said, "I can't do that." I was quite new to yoga and very stiff, with both knees high up in the air when I attempted to sit in even the most basic cross-legged posture. He replied, "You *can* do it, here, now; just follow my instructions." I did, and to my amazement, in a matter of seconds, I found that my body was sitting perfectly and effortlessly in this quite advanced asana, for the duration of the meeting, without the slightest discomfort.

All other prepared and complex questions simply melted away. There was actually nothing to ask, and, along with a feeling of being as transparent to him as a wafer-thin pane of glass, only the purest sense of being remained. How strange, simple and timeless everything became in the presence of this swami.

I floated out of the kutir and later realized that in the unexpected bliss of being with him, I had forgotten to ask for a spiritual name. I was lucky enough to be received by him again the next day. When he said my name it was like being given an exquisitely tailored garment to put on, with an accompanying internal voice saying, "Yes, that fits and feels completely right now."

Back in my room I tried to practise siddha yoni asana again. It was impossible! It took two and a half years of rigorous and regular sadhana before my body was even close to repeating the effortless performance that had taken place in the kutir.

The following night was time to go, the taps in my eyes had dried up for now, and I recall walking out of the ashram gates, alone, in the dark, heading for Australia, with the most

powerful sense of absolute fearlessness. Despite having no idea what life had in store, I knew for certain that I would return to the Bihar School of Yoga.

Since that first encounter, the supposedly lifelong, serious health issues were completely resolved through Satyananda Yoga. There has been a magnetic pull, on both an internal and external plane, and an inexplicable sense of connection and guidance; a sense that, despite all the terrible things taking place on a daily basis, somewhere in the world there is this extraordinary, positive, uplifting force to tune into or to attempt to align oneself with, that provides a counterbalance.

The key thing I have learnt from Sri Swamiji is that if we are blessed enough to have come into contact with him, or to have benefited in any way from the superb, integrated system of yoga that he devised to relieve suffering and awaken awareness, it is our fundamental duty to learn from his graphic example: to use this good fortune, working body and mind to help others in need, and to serve in whatever way is possible and available to us.

While the small gross mind will selfishly miss the sight of Sri Swamiji's physical body each year, the light he has awakened in so many hearts and minds remains absolutely inextinguishable.

—*Sannyasi Atmatattwa, UK*

Beyond appearances

Looking back over my life, I am convinced that Swami Satyananda has been taking care of me at least since we first met and probably even before.

I first came to Munger at the end of 1981. At that time Ganga Darshan was under construction so all the residents were living down at the old BSY. I was put in a room up at the BSY-to be. Each morning I would collect cabbages from the garden and carry them down to old BSY where I was met with a bevy of Australian female devotees who kept saying, "Wait until you meet Swamiji, wait until you meet Swamiji".

When I finally did meet Swami Satyananda it was to chop vegetables and to carry heavy stones for the clearing of the land around Ganga Darshan.

My earlier exposure and training in yoga began in 1961 in Lonavala at Kaivalyadhama where the concept of karma yoga was never mentioned, let alone put into practice. Needless to say, I was neither enamoured with karma yoga nor with Swami Satyananda, who was making me do it!

I was ready to leave Munger until one day, as a gang of us were lifting heavy rocks, Swami Satyananda came up to me and asked me how my Hindi lessons were progressing. I was flabbergasted, because at the time I was trying to learn Hindi from a set of language tapes. As there was no one else in my room and I kept the room locked, the fact that he knew this made me begin to think that Swami Satyananda might indeed be special. I then and there decided to prolong my stay.

At the end of December 1981 there was a kriya yoga course. The course was given in what is today known as Jyoti Mandir. One French man often spoke about how he was looking forward to the siddhis he would gain from kriya yoga. On the first day of the course he injured his back and could not continue. This made me think that there was more going on at BSY than met the eye.

Another time, later in my association with Swami Satyananda, after an ego-boosting conversation with him I was feeling extremely pleased with myself, but, as I climbed the steps from Yoga Arogya to Main Building I badly stubbed my toe. At that moment I knew that Sri Swamiji was teaching me a lesson. To this day, whenever ego takes me over, I counteract it by thinking back to that very painful toe-stubbing experience.

My job in Bangkok gave me two months vacation every year. These I would spend in Munger taking courses and doing lots of karma yoga (which I was gradually beginning to appreciate and even enjoy). The morning after my arrival in Munger and the day of my departure Swami Satyananda would always make a point of seeing me.

One of the great delights of these stays in Munger was listening to Swami Satyananda's satsangs. The incredible thing about his satsangs was that, although they were in response to various questions raised by the devotees, they answered questions which were in my mind at the time which were totally unrelated to the topic which Swamiji was discussing.

Initially, I was not at all keen on taking sannyasa because traditionally, when one took sannyasa, one was supposed to give all one's possessions to the guru and live with him for twelve years.

My job working with relief and development in South-East Asia gave me a sense of usefulness and fulfilment, so I did not want to give it up. To my great surprise, when I asked Sri Swamiji if I would have to or not, he assured me that I would not. I therefore took sannyasa on Sivaratri 1985.

When I was in elementary school, my hand was stabbed with a pencil, leaving a piece of lead embedded under the skin. Immediately after my sannyasa initiation, the place where the lead was began to fester and the lead came out along with the poison. The lead from the pencil had been deep in the flesh of my left hand for over thirty years!

After Swami Satyananda had completed his panchagni sadhana and started the annual yajnas, I would regularly come from Bangkok to attend them. Despite the crowds he would always make a point of giving me a little time. In 2003, several days after the program was over, he bumped into me near Yajnashala and exclaimed, "Oh, you are still here!" The next day there was darshan in Ganesh Kutir at which I seemed to be the centre of attraction. One of the topics, which Swamiji brought up was my prostate and how eating garlic was good for prostate health in older men. Three years later I had to have my prostate removed.

A few weeks after this darshan I experienced a critical health issue for which I had to undergo surgery. When I left the hospital, the doctors declared I was lucky to be alive. I knew that this was thanks to the special darshan which I had had with Sri Swamiji.

The last time I saw Swami Satyananda was at Sita Kalyanam in 2008. He came over to me to enquire about my health and said, “Don’t worry about anything for I shall be looking after you.” Now that he has left the mortal coil, I can feel that this is even more the case.

—Swami Agnihotri Saraswati, USA



Shraddhanjali Saptah

*Addresses given on the concluding day of the Shraddhanjali
Saptah, Ganga Darshan, 30 December 2009*

The power of the seed

Hari Om.

A meeting to pay tribute to Sri Swamiji feels somewhat perplexing to me. A tribute is offered to someone whose absence we feel, but how do we offer a tribute to one who is always present within us? However, as the rituals and traditions must be observed, we have gathered today to pay tribute.

How do I offer my tributes to Sri Swamiji – as a yoga guru, a sannyasin or a human being? These are the three qualities that I observed in him at very close range. I feel that he possessed the very same guru shakti as the saints and sages of the civilizations that existed five thousand years ago. They used to live in the caves and forests, but they had such power and force that the sons of kings would go to learn from them. Whether it was the *Ramayana* or the Mahabharata period, princes born in palaces would go to the caves and forests to receive the guru's teachings. Perhaps it was in adherence to this tradition that I saw him as a human being and also as my guru.

Today I feel happy that Munger is the place where he united the seed of yoga and sannyasa. The power of the seed is such that in future it assumes a momentous form and

its fruits provide sustenance and branches provide shade to everyone. I believe that Sri Swamiji has given this message to us by walking the path from here to Rikhia, and we will see its fruition in days to come.

With these few words I offer my respects to Sri Swami Satyananda, and I can say with faith and confidence that the seed through which he drew us all and helped us grow will enable the people of the world to live their lives in a more peaceful way.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

—*Sri Digvijay Singh, Member of Parliament*

Love and brotherhood

Hari Om.

Revered Swami Niranjananandaji, Swami Satyasanganandaji, Swami Suryaprakashji, other respected swamis, and brothers and sisters who are followers of Swami Satyanandaji and are related to the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, and Rikhiapeeth.

Today is the last day of the week-long program conducted at Ganga Darshan Ashram in memory of Swami Satyanandaji. I have full faith that the life Swami Satyanandaji lived and the message that he has given through his deeds and austerities will continue to spread. I have firm faith that Swami Niranjananandaji will attain full success in this task, and while following the path of his guru, he will fill people's minds and hearts with love.

The greatest thing that our saints have taught us is love and brotherhood. It is only by the grace of Swami Niranjananandaji that I practise yoga daily for a few minutes, and whenever the opportunity arises, I speak about it in society. I feel that if anyone practises even a few yogasanas for a short time regularly, his mind remains peaceful and there is a greater increase in energy on account of which he can work for longer periods.

Therefore, although my knowledge is limited, this much is certain – that the message of love is most important. We

live with unnecessary tension. A life of tension is no life. It is harmful to one's health, to oneself and to society as well. Hence, in the light of my limited role in society, I try to see that there is an environment of peace, goodwill and brotherhood in society. I am happy that with the blessings of all of you, this kind of environment is gradually being created.

I have come here to offer the flowers of my respect at the feet of Swami Satyanandaji. In this I have only one interest, and that is his teachings. His disciples, Swami Satsangiji, Peethadhiswari of Rikhiapeeth, Swami Niranjananandaji, the successor of his sannyasa mission, and Swami Suryaprakashji, President of the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, are present here. I am sure that the yoga work will continue in the future and will certainly have an automatic influence on society. It is due, not to us, but to the influence and efforts of saints and sannyasins like you that the social environment is improving.

When we were leaving for Munger, the pilot of our helicopter showed us some pictures he had taken of the important places in Bihar. I recognized most of them except one. As our helicopter hovered over this place, the secretary of our secretariat, Chanchalji exclaimed, "This is a picture of Munger Yogashram!" Really, it adds glory to Bihar. We would like its influence to grow so that the new generation has an environment and campus where they learn to think well and to do good, which is the greatest thing that people can achieve.

Sri Swami Satyanandaji's influence has spread all over the world. He restored and re-established yoga all over the world. Our ancient knowledge of yoga was gathering dust. Sri Swamiji removed that layer of dust with the inspiration of his guru, Pujya Swami Sivanandaji, and today yoga is recognized all over the world.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to visit Rikhia and meet Swami Satsangiji. At that time Swami Satyanandaji was not giving darshan. I saw the place where he had

performed panchagni sadhana. A worldly man as I am, I could not understand the extent and intensity of the arduous austerities he had performed. After this, my desire to have the darshan of Sri Swamiji became much stronger.

Last year, Swami Niranjananandaji sent a swami to teach me yoga so that I could perform the practices properly. He provided a printout of the Rikhiapeeth program, and at that time I thought that I would go to Rikhia. When I went there, I was fortunate enough to have darshan of Sri Swamiji. I also had the opportunity of listening to some great inspirational words from him.

When I learnt about his Mahasamadhi, as we are worldly people, I immediately thought, “How nice it would have been to have gone to Rikhia this year also.” However, to go to such places is not always in our hands. Last year I was fortunate enough to visit, but this year I could not make it. Later I went there to offer my respects and reverence, and today I have the opportunity to come to Munger.

We perform different activities every day. If we practise yoga, we receive the energy to work harder and the mind becomes peaceful. These benefits can always be seen. God has given us the opportunity to work hard. So we march ahead through our karma. Today I say that I will try to work with zeal so that an environment is created that will bring about love and brotherhood in society. This is the greatest teaching for us.

I offer my respects and reverence to Swami Satyanandaji’s memory. As we have heard, he relinquished his body out of his own choice. Swami Satsangiji told us in Rikhia that he entered into Mahasamadhi in the ajeya muhurta. If he had desired, he could have lived for years, but he decided to go. A poem by him tells us, “I have already done everything.”

Now he has become all-pervasive and omnipresent, and will keep his eyes on all of us, and see who is doing what. We are not saints and swamis and have not performed any sadhana or austerities. So, relinquishing our body at will is not possible, but everybody has to leave the body, this is the

greatest truth of the world. After leaving the body, we have to present an account of our doings throughout our life to someone. If someone has given us this body, there must also be someone to take the last account. I feel that Swami Satyanandaji has now become a part of the group of people who will take this account.

Let us do good, propagate love, behave lovingly and devote our time and energy to unite and build society along these lines. This will be our greatest tribute to Swami Satyanandaji. With these words I offer my most respectful homage to Puja Swami Satyanandaji.

I also express my feelings of reverence to Swami Niranjananandaji and Swami Satsangiji. Ganga Darshan is bound to grow and progress more and more. The effect and influence of its work and mission will spread throughout Bihar, India and all over the world with greater impact than ever before.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

—Sri Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister, Bihar

Life is eternal

Hari Om.

Swami Niranjanji, Honourable Chief Minister and the residents of Munger – my loving *Hari Om* to everyone. I am blessed to be present here today. Munger is not an unknown place for me. Yes, I live in Rikhia, but I had my birth in Munger, my spiritual birth. Twenty-eight years ago, I received sannayasa diksha from Gurudev here at Ganga Darshan in Munger. On that same day, the foundation stone of Ganga Darshan was laid by Sri Swamiji. I have known Munger since then. So many years have passed, and all these years I lived with Gurudev. Let me tell you a little about the teachings that I received from him during this period.

There are two founding pillars of life. A successful life has two founding pillars – one is *jnana*, wisdom, and the other is *karma*, action. If the actions that we perform do not give a

glimpse of wisdom, then of what use can they be, and if we only focus on acquiring wisdom and do not let it flow into our actions, then that wisdom too is of no use. Wisdom is enhanced and grows by sharing. This was the main teaching of Sri Swamiji. Thus, in his lifetime, he established two very powerful centres – one, Ganga Darshan, Munger, which was his medium of jnana.

Nothing in the whole world compares with the stream of wisdom that is going out of here. I have travelled all over the world; therefore I can tell you the truth that you will not find anything comparable anywhere in the world. This is why people from every country are continuously drawn to this place. They receive higher learning here. In essence that is what people want; therefore they are drawn to it. The other founding pillar that Sri Swamiji gave to us was the way to perform karma. To impart this teaching, he established Rikhiapeeth. Thus he gave us two founding pillars – one, where you can know and receive wisdom, and the other where you can learn how to perform karma.

A bird cannot fly without two wings; it becomes helpless if you cut off one of its wings. In the same way, our life cannot be efficient if we do not learn these two skills. Even in his last moments, this is what Swamiji emphasized on. He drew my attention to this very subject – we all want happiness in life and all our efforts are aimed at how to be happy, but do we ever think that death should also be happy? He answered the question of how we can have a happy death through these two founding pillars. When we perform our actions with the help of wisdom, when they contain a glimpse of wisdom, when we think about others and especially those who are not related to us, they are called good karmas. That is what will bring about a happy death.

On 5th December, Sri Swamiji left his body as a yogi, of his own choice. There was no need for him to leave his body, just as there was no need for him to leave Munger. He left Munger of his own choice because he did not have any attachment. In 1988, he simply picked up his jhola and

walked out. He strolled in the garden and then walked out. No one could even anticipate that Swamiji would never come back. In the same way, on 2nd December he addressed everyone on the occasion of his birthday celebrations, and on 5th December, he left his body, taking his good karmas with him. No one had any idea that he was going to take this step, everyone was surprised. He departed of his own choice.

He called me at night, at 10 pm, and said to me, “Everything that I did in my life had a purpose, and so there is a purpose of my death as well. I have decided to go.” Have you ever heard of anyone who invites his own death? Only a person who has always performed good karmas can do this. Otherwise we are afraid of death. One who has no worries, no attachment, no guilt, who has accomplished everything in life and done everything he needs to do, can do this. He went fully prepared having organized everything to the last dot. There was nothing he left undone or unsaid. His life was an epitome of perfection and so too was his death. Therefore, the Shraddhanjali that we are all present at and the Shodhashi Pooja that was held in Rikhia are not events of mourning. Swamiji would never want that we mourn his death. He always said that he had come to Rikhia to leave his body. He never said that he came to Rikhia to build an ashram. He came to Rikhia to leave his body. He also said that, “The moment I get a return ticket, I will leave.” So on 5th December, at the ajaya muhurta, he received the return ticket and he left.

While departing he said, “Just as you shed your old clothes for new ones, in the same way the *jiva* or individual soul leaves its old body and assumes a new one. It is called transition. It is not called the end. Life does not end by leaving a body for life is eternal.” That is what he said and this is what we have to believe, for this is what the *Bhagavad Gita* says, this is what the Upanishads and the Vedas say, and this is what Sri Swami Satyananda said.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

—Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati

My Guru, Sri Swamiji

Hari Om.

At midnight of 5th December, Sri Swamiji entered into Mahasamadhi. At the time of his Mahasamadhi, it had been twenty years since Sri Swamiji had come to Rikhia. You must have known from him that his life is divided into twenty-year cycles. For the first twenty years of his life, he lived at home. For the next twenty years, he lived at his guru's ashram in Rishikesh and immersed himself in seva.

In the third cycle of twenty years he came to Munger and following his guru's direct mandate to him, established yoga as a worldwide movement. He created a monument of yoga in Munger, and then offered it as a tribute at the feet of his guru, Swami Sivananda. He said, "This was your mandate which I completed. Now I offer it to you. Now I have become free of my guru's mandate." In this way, after being here for twenty years, he walked away from it.

The last chapter of his life, Rikhia, was also a twenty-year period. It started in 1989 when he came to Rikhia and culminated in 2009. In Rikhia, he dedicated his life to live the sannyasa life and the teachings of his guru. Therefore, Rikhiapeeth is another monument created by him and dedicated to his guru.

Sri Swamiji always said that when I have to leave my body, it will not be in a hospital, surrounded by disciples and with tubes in my nose and mouth, but in a state of meditation. In a poem he says:

*With nothing on the body,
And with nothing in my hands,
Let me roam on the bank of the Ganga
With the name of Shiva on my lips
And the thought of Devi and Durga in my mind.
Let me not even know that I exist,
And when I die,
I will not know that I am dying.*

That is exactly what he achieved. A *siddha*, perfected being, works according to *sankalpas*, resolves, in his life and not according to personal wish or desire. In Sri Swamiji's life we see the force of his sankalpa shakti and what he achieved through his sankalpa shakti – he hoisted the flag of yoga and of the Bihar Yoga Tradition in the world from Munger and brought honour to Bihar. Thereafter, Rikhia became his tapobhoomi. He performed arduous higher vedic sadhanas there, which have been prescribed for paramahansa sannyasins. He practised panchagni sadhana, along with other sadhanas. You have also been witness to that. He lived a simple life and the lifestyle of a sannyasin. Sannyasa is a medium to realize and surrender to the guru and God residing within. In Rikhia, Sri Swamiji moulded and lived his life as per the teachings of his guru and also inspired others to live these teachings of 'serve, love, give'. Sri Swamiji converted Rikhia village into Rikhiapeeth with the mandate to propagate these fundamental messages of spiritual life.

The fundamental message of spiritual life is: improve the quality of life. The quality of life improves when we are able to come out of our shells and connect with other people through service, through love and through sharing. These are the inspirations that Sri Swamiji himself gave in Rikhia.

The last darshan and homage

After his Mahasamadhi, Sri Swamiji gave his last darshan to everyone on 6th December. Thousands of villagers, visitors, delegates and disciples gathered at Rikhiapeeth on that day to have the last glimpse of their guru, of a siddha and a saint. At the *godhuli bela*, the hour of dusk, a poorna abhisheka was performed on Sri Swamiji at the Panchagni Vedi, and then he was given the *bhu samadhi*, burial in earth, at Parna Kutir.

Thereafter, from 7th to 22nd, as per the tradition of sannyasins, a sixteen-day Shodashi Anushthan was conducted at Rikhiapeeth. Every day, there were different havans and Rudrabhisheka, chanting of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the

Ramacharitamanas, chanting of stotras and the singing of kirtan at the pace set by the exemplary kanyas and batuks of Rikhia. Every day, the villagers of Rikhia Panchayat were invited for *bhandara*, mass feeding, and over five hundred families were given prasad daily with Sri Swamiji's blessings. A special pooja to instal the guru tattwa in the mandala of Sri Yantra was performed by yoginis from South India, and a special Rudrabhisheka was conducted by pandits from Varanasi. A sannyasin bhoj was also held for representatives of different *sampradayas* and *paramparas*, spiritual traditions and sannyasa orders.

All through these sixteen days, thousands flocked from all over the world to Rikhiapeeth. Many came in tears, but as they basked in the radiance of peace and silence pervading Sri Swamiji's samadhi sthal, you could see that they were experiencing a deep sense of contentment and fulfilment, and that they felt the presence of Sri Swamiji in their hearts.

From 24th to 30th, a Shraddhanjali Saptah was organized at Ganga Darshan, Munger, where again thousands came to pay homage amidst the singing and chanting of bhajan, kirtan, stotras and mantras, the performance of havan and pooja, and a daily bhandara.

The future

People have been asking what will happen after Sri Swamiji's Mahasamadhi. They ask, now that Sri Swamiji is not present, what will be the future of the institution, of yoga, of Munger, of Rikhia? To these questions I have one answer – Sri Swamiji left Munger and the yoga work in 1988, and all these years I took on the mandate to carry on the work of yoga and develop Ganga Darshan. Then, in 2008, I handed over the charge of the yoga movement and yoga mission to Swami Suryaprakash. For twenty-five years of my time and for two years of Swami Suryaprakash's time the ashram has continued to grow, thrive and propagate the vision and mission for which Sri Swami Satyananda had established this monument of yoga, Ganga Darshan.

He created Ganga Darshan because that was the instruction, the mandate, received by him from his guru: “Spread the message of yoga from door to door and shore to shore.” In Munger he said, “You have given the instruction to propagate yoga. I shall work for yoga, I shall create a monument of yoga and I shall dedicate that monument to you, as it is the accomplishment of your mandate. I am following your mandate. I am following your order.”

The modern world has not seen a visionary like Swami Satyananda. The history of whichever institution or saint we look at, we find that they definitely do a good job with good intentions, but they do not prepare the future. Sri Swamiji left the responsibilities of Munger and Ganga Darshan twenty-seven years ago. He became free. However, the further developments and accomplishments in yoga that have taken place through Ganga Darshan in the last twenty-five years have definitely been unique and unparalleled, and this trend and pace will continue.

In the same way, Rikhiapeeth has been under the care of Swami Satyasangananda for the last twenty years, and she has been managing it very effectively and efficiently at all levels. Sri Swamiji’s physical presence and inspiration were there, but the entire management and development of Rikhia has been done by Swami Satyasangananda.

So, as far as Munger and Rikhia are concerned, the work is not going to stop. With Sri Swamiji’s blessings and grace, this work will move forward every day and cover more ground. For this was the blessing that our guru had, and today we also experience this blessing in the form of God’s grace. The mission of both ashrams will continue to thrive and they will continue to propagate the yogic and spiritual vision of Sri Swami Sivananda and Sri Swami Satyananda.

People also ask: what will Swami Niranjana do now. I am now free to follow the new direction that Sri Swamiji gave to me this year. In March 2009, he instructed me to end my parivrajaka life and gave clear direction for the next phase of my life. He said to me, terminate your wandering peripatetic

life. You have travelled for forty years throughout the country and the globe. Now a new chapter has to begin. He said, sit still in one place and work for the development of yoga, for the sannyasa tradition and for the welfare of people. He cleared my path, he strengthened my will and guided me towards the direction in which I have to walk now onwards.

Now I am not a sannyasin of Munger or of Rikhia; I am Swami Satyananda's sannyasin. People say that you are Swami Satyananda's successor. This is true. I am his successor, but not of an institution. In an institution, people change. The succession that I have received from my guru is that of sannyasa. My inheritance is the commitment to sannyasa that he had in his life. I have to walk forward on the path of his *samarpan*, surrender, *tyaga*, renunciation, *tapasya*, austerity. Therefore, I am saying this before everyone today that now I am not a sannyasin of Munger or of Rikhia. I am only a simple sannyasin disciple of Swami Satyananda and that is how I wish you all to recognize me. I shall continue to move between Munger and Rikhia, but I do not belong to either of the places.

So, in your prayers include one more prayer that may this sannyasin walk the path that he has decided on and may he be successful in that. May he succeed Swami Satyananda in his sannyasa, in his determination, in his conviction, in his faith and in his austerities so that the two traditions of yoga and sannyasa are established in Bihar and they bring honour to the whole society, the whole country, the whole world. That is the work that we have to do now. With your good wishes, I am sure I shall be able to cover the distance that Sri Swamiji has told me to cover. The goodwill that you have towards this ashram, towards Sri Swami Satyananda, towards his work, should be upheld and protected. Continue to develop your faith, belief, dedication and surrender. We shall meet time and again, either in Ganga Darshan or in Rikhia, until another instruction comes for me to come out.

Sri Swamiji's spiritual strength and inspiration is the foundation of our life and today we invoke that force and

inspiration to descend in us. Let us welcome Sri Swamiji to become the in-dweller of our lives, and offer him the throne on which he can sit within us as the emperor of hearts so that we can always be one with his presence and grace.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

—*Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*





On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee World Yoga Convention 2013, Munger, Bihar School of Yoga is pleased to present *The Golden Collection*, a compilation of the first publications of Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati. Originally published in booklet format during the 1960's and 1970's, their modest nature made the wealth of the ancient science of yoga accessible to one and all.

Some volumes of *The Golden Collection* are of a different nature. They present tributes paid to Sri Swami Satyananda over a period of fifty-five years. From 1954 onwards people expressed their recognition, gratitude and love. These volumes are a chronicle of devotion to the extraordinary man and his mission.

Volume 8 of *The Golden Collection* is a tribute to Sri Swami Satyananda, his life and teaching. After his Mahasamadhi in 2009, devotees and disciples expressed their love and gratitude to the man who changed their lives forever. *Tributes to a Saint* were published in *Yoga* magazine in 2010. They recognize the profound impact Sri Swamiji had on people from all walks of life and all corners of the globe. He dedicated his life to the upliftment of humankind, and those who knew him personally or through his teachings are forever grateful to him.



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